

Wanderlust

TRAVEL MAGAZINE

www.wanderlust.co.uk October 2015

**21 Latin
America
wonders**

The best heritage
sites – revealed!

Win!

A photo commission to
Western Australia &
travel luggage
See page 4

A WALK IN THE WOODS

Appalachian Trail – IN TWO WEEKS



**Azores ♦ Vietnam ♦ Burma ♦ India ♦ Thailand
♦ Morocco ♦ Iceland ♦ Geneva ♦ Adelaide**



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Tree-tastic
Fall colours warm up the USA's New England landscape through which the Appalachian Trail passes through

Welcome



There's something about the autumn that makes one immediately think of trees. And with the release of *A Walk in the Woods* in the cinemas, based on Bill Bryson's bestselling book, the time was right to head out on the legendary Appalachian Trail ourselves. But, like so many of us, *Wanderlust* editor Phoebe has a day job and so took a leaf out of Bryson's book and decided to take a car and cherry pick the highlights, walking some of the best sections and meeting some incredible people (p26) in two weeks.

Having a UNESCO World Heritage Site status inevitably makes a place a must-see for *Wanderlust*-ers, and on page 42 we take a look at 21 of South America's top sites. We also drop in on the UNESCO-rated Angra do Heroísmo in the Azores, before cycling a new Darwin-inspired trail (p92), and hop on Vietnam's *Reunification Express* (p110).

This is the time of year when we want to know about your travels – with the opening of our annual travel awards. So fill out the form in this magazine, or online at wanderlusttravelawards.co.uk. Talking of awards (and Bill Bryson!), we hope to see many of you on 13 October for what is always a magical evening – the World Guide Awards (p18).

Happy travels,

Lyn

Lyn Hughes
Editor-In-Chief/Publisher/Co-founder

5 THINGS WE LEARNED THIS ISSUE:

1 Cow's eyeballs and worms are just a number of fillings used in authentic Mexican tacos; p16

2 Your feet can grow by around three shoe sizes while walking the USA's Appalachian Trail; p26

3 The gurnard fish has wings that both scare off predators and are used during mating; p92

4 Trainspotters prepare to be disappointed: there's no one *Reunification Express* train; p110

5 Uruguay's Fray Bentos factory, famous for tinned meat pies, is one of UNESCO's newest sites; p42



THE TEAM

What have they been up to this month?



PHOEBE SMITH
♦ EDITOR ♦

Following in the footsteps of Bill Bryson checking out the USA's Appalachian Trail
SEE PAGE 26



SARAH BAXTER
♦ ASSOCIATE EDITOR ♦

Gasping at the great geothermal geysers in Iceland
SEE PAGE 137



TOM HAWKER
♦ PRODUCTION EDITOR ♦

Grabbing his bike and dreaming of cycling the Azores' new trail
SEE PAGE 92



RHODRI ANDREWS
♦ EDITORIAL ASSISTANT ♦

Dreaming of his future adventure travel-packed retirement
SEE PAGE 12

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In memory of co-founder & publisher **Paul Morrison**

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This issue was brought to you in part by...



ELINOR GREENWOOD

Author and Mandarin teacher

After taking a degree in modern Chinese studies, Elinor lived, worked and studied in China for many years. Author of two Chinese language books, she is now based in Hertfordshire and teaches Mandarin to children. Fancy learning Chinese yourself? Turn to p64 for Elinor's 5-step tips

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle... which are you? Desert, especially baked Alaska.

First great travel experience?

Riding an elephant in Thailand when I was 9.

Favourite journey?

Most fun: misadventures in a Kombi van between Sydney and Cairns.

Biggest adventure: travelling overland from Beijing to Delhi via the Karakoram Highway.

Top five places worldwide?

Beijing, North Norfolk, Great Barrier Reef, Mauritius, Ithaca, the Masai Mara... Oops that's six.

Passport stamp you're proudest of?

China.

Passport stamp you'd most like to have?

Tibet.

Guilty travel pleasure?

Gin and tonic with Pringles.



CHARLIE WALKER

Globetrotting cycling travel blogger

The intrepid blogger, who once embarked on a four-year, 64,000km journey around the world on just a pushbike, shares his tips on how to get over the post-travel blues – see p62

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle... which are you? I'm a mountain man!

First great travel experience?

When I was 19, I backpacked across West Africa and bumped into a camp of Sierra Leonean refugees – their stories were both fascinating and harrowing.

Favourite journey?

I once bought a Mongol pony and spent a couple of months wandering across the Mongolian grasslands and forests – the space and freedom of that vast and sparse country is refreshing.

Top five places worldwide?

Lake Nkuruba, Uganda; Tian Shan Mountains, Kyrgyzstan; Laikipia, Kenya; northern Sweden; Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Passport stamp you're proudest of?

DR Congo.

Passport stamp you'd most like to have?

Papua New Guinea.

Guilty travel pleasure?

Finding somewhere quiet to read a good book with a mound of snack food!



LAURIE POTTEIGER

Appalachian Trail Conservancy services manager

One of the Appalachian Trail's (AT) maintenance team, she once bumped into Bill Bryson and earned herself a mention in his book *A Walk in the Woods*. Nearly 20 years on, she meets our editor Phoebe Smith as she treads the trail – see p26

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle... which are you? Mountain!

First great travel experience?

Exploring the Virginia countryside by car with just a road map and no agenda with my free-spirited mother.

Favourite journey?

Every walk on the AT, from a two-hour easy stroll to a life-changing and arduous Georgia-to-Maine 3,700km journey.

Top five places worldwide?

The AT; Harpers Ferry, West Virginia; St Petersburg; the Florida Keys; Washington DC.

Passport stamp you're proudest of?

The USSR in the early 1980s.

Passport stamp you'd most like to have?

The AT has its own "passport" – I'd like to get stamps for the businesses I haven't visited yet.

Guilty travel pleasure?

Staying at the lodges in Shenandoah National Park, where my husband and I honeymooned.

Wanderlust Mission Statement

Wanderlust aims to inform and inspire all your travel adventures. We strive to bring you the most trusted and reliable information in the world. That's why we are always upfront about whether our writers have travelled independently or with a tour company. When a tour operator has been used we always try to use those who've scored a minimum satisfaction rating of 85% from readers in our annual awards and we never guarantee positive coverage. Responsible and sustainable travel is at the heart of everything we do.




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We follow in Bill Bryson's footsteps to pack in the best bits the 14-state, 2,000-odd mile Appalachian Trail in the USA – in just two weeks

■ Special feature

42 21 World Heritage Wonders in Latin America
As travel in Latin America heats up, we explore the 21 most exciting UNESCO-listed marvels that the continent has to offer...

WIN!

Lowe Alpine luggage, p60
A trip to Western Australia or £3,000 in the Wanderlust Travel Photo of the Year, p90



"Sitting on top of one of the planet's major fault lines, Iceland is a hotbed of geothermal activity."

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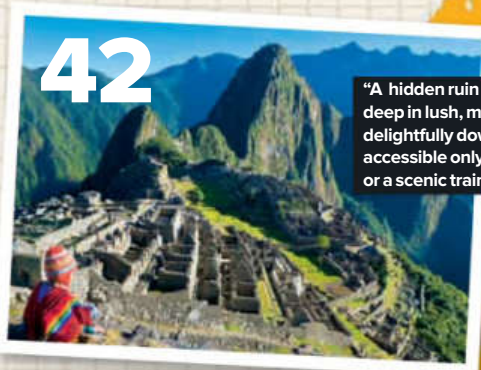
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"Genevans are either leading the world or saving it, yet the overriding impression is one of complete serenity." *Thomas Rees*

Appalachian Trail, p26

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"A hidden ruin that out-foxed the Spanish, tucked deep in lush, misty mountains, tumbling delightfully down an improbable slope, and accessible only via a splendid old paved pathway or a scenic train – what's not to love?"

TALKING HEADS

Paul Theroux, p20

"On my *Deep South* trip, I rediscovered what travel should be – liberating, enlightening and it shouldn't involve being interrogated."

RETURN OF THE JUNGLE KING...

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Alamy

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The Swiss city is home to the UN and filled with finance, but it surprisingly feels more laid-back small town than bustling big city

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New meets old in the South Australian capital as the cheerful multi-ethnic city enjoys a rejuvenation, not least its arts scene





360°

V i e w f i n d e r



ARCTIC SURFER Unstad Beach, Norway

Photographer: **Chris Burkard**

Bondi Beach, Hawaii, *the Arctic*...? Chilly Unstad Beach in northern Norway doesn't seem like your usual surfing hotspot – dipping as it frequently does into sub-zero temperatures – but its ice-topped mountains flank some well-regarded swells, a cool scene captured in lensman Chris Burkard's new short film, *Arctic Swell*. So if you can't experience Unstad's 'Arctic aloha' at in person, you can see the movie instead – and many others – at this year's touring Ocean Film Festival.

***Arctic Swell* is one of the short films shown at the Ocean Film Festival's world tour. For a full list of UK dates and locations, visit www.oceanfilmfestival.co.uk**



COLOURFUL CROWDSURF

Rajasthan, India

Photographer: **Steve McCurry**

A green-splattered local floats on a sea of red in Rajasthan as the delirious chaos of the Holi Festival crashes beneath him. This kaleidoscope of powdered colours is now duplicated in many cities across the planet, but acclaimed photographer Steve McCurry heads for the source, capturing India at its brightest, happiest and most vibrant. Steve's new book collects together the cream of 35 years of regular visits to what he considers a 'photographer's paradise' – and sets about proving his point too.

© **Steve McCurry. Reprinted from India (2015, Phaidon, £40), which is out on 26 October 2015**





CITY IN LIGHTS New York City, USA

Photographer: **George Steinmetz**

The city that never sleeps certainly looks alive – electric, even – at night. The New York City skyline is one of the most photographed in the world but photographer George Steinmetz' new book has managed to find a fresh view on it – a series of surprising, revealing and some plain classic images from way above the great metropolis. Big, bright and bold, like the city itself.

© **George Steinmetz; New York Air: The View From Above** (Abrams, £25) is published 13 October



12 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW THIS MONTH...

Your October essentials: Paul Theroux hits the Deep South; Berlin gets lit up; tuck into a taco; whales in Africa; trips to cure the winter blues

1

■ Travel issues

You're never too old for an adventure

As Bradt Travel Guides release a book celebrating the older traveller, we consider the pros and cons of the silver-haired adventurers...

Mention the word 'adventurer' and the stereotypical image of an excited 20-something usually springs to most people's minds. But just how accurate is it?

Not very, according to 74-year-old Hilary Bradt, ardent adventure-seeker and founder of Bradt Travel Guides, which has just published *To Oldly Go*, a collection of stories written by travellers over 60. "Older people have both time and money to travel," she explains. "They don't want consumer goods; they want experiences and you get that best through travel."

The book itself features 41 tales of retirees doing everything from traversing the Atlas Mountains, to a solo cycle around the world. One contributor, Hazel Pennington, who tackled a via ferrata in the Dolomites, says it's the realisation that life isn't forever that spurs on older explorers. "It makes us want to get to those places we've always meant to. I suspect that in my last days I'll be glad I took a few risks rather than staying safely at home."

But are there more risks with leaving these kind of adventures until later in life? "It's vital to have travel insurance – one that covers pre-existing medical conditions, which can be more expensive," advises Jennie Carr of SilverTravelAdvisor.com. You'll also need to be aware of age limits on some trips and you may well have physical constraints, such as no longer feeling comfortable being cramped into a crowded train for hours.

But the benefits of silver travel can be huge, from the obvious discounts on public transport and attractions, to feeling more confident. "As a woman alone you are respected rather than hassled," says Hilary, "and your life experience enables you to judge risk. You are likely to be comfortable inside your skin and less prone to anxiety or depression, and you know what you like doing. And do it."

So if you're retired, swap your slippers for walking boots and, if you're unlucky enough to still be too young to have fun, know that there's still myriad adventures around the corner.

'When you're an older traveller, you know what you like doing. And do it'

Pushing back
Age is increasingly being proved to be less of an issue for travellers... in fact, quite the opposite

■ The Nitty Gritty Golden oldies

Here's five age-defying travellers who have cracked some of the globe's toughest challenges

1 Yuichiro Miura

The Japanese skier summited Mount Everest at the sprightly age of 80 in 2013 – the oldest to do so. It was his third successful climb: he was 70 on his first ascent.

2 Dorothy Davenhill Hirsch

Most of us wouldn't attempt surviving below -40°C, but while aboard the Russian nuclear-powered icebreaker *Yamal*, American traveller Dorothy did just that to reach the North Pole at the grand old age of 89 in 2004.

3 Minoru Saito

Sailing solo around the planet is impressive, but doing it *another* seven times? In 2011, this Japanese yachtsman became the oldest person to achieve eight circumnavigations, aged 77.

4 Nan Reisinger

Completing the USA's 3,500km Appalachian Trail is no mean feat in itself but Nan did in 2014 and – at 74 years old – is the oldest woman to finish it.

5 Otto Thaning

Most people drive or take the *Eurostar* but, at 73 years old, this South African retiree – a former surgeon – became the oldest person to swim the 34km English Channel in 2014.

■ Online reader poll

We asked you: how old is too old to travel? You said...



New Routes

GO NOW...

Unified, divided
The TV Tower looms over Berlin, as the Spree River slices through it

2 Berlin shines in October – for light fests and Reunification Day

Why go?

Berlin is one of the coolest cities in Europe. Nowhere else has that mix of modern, futuristic and poignant past. Walk between Checkpoint Charlie, remnants of the Wall, the artsy Kreuzburg neighbourhood and revamped Potsdamer Platz and you can timewarp between 1940 and the advancing 21st century in the space of a few hundred metres.

October is ideal for soaking up all sides of Berlin. The 3 October 2015 is the 25th anniversary of

German reunification. Head to the Brandenburg Gate to party with the locals – festival activities include funfair rides, theatre, games and beer drinking – or go to a concert at the cathedral.

Stay longer to see some of Berlin's most iconic monuments in a different light – literally. Berlin Leuchtet (2-18 October; berlin-leuchtet.com) and the Festival of Lights (9-18 October; festival-of-lights.de) are the city's two illumination festivals, cloaking buildings and

neighbourhoods in a brilliance of projected art and colours.

Finally, from 28 October, Ryanair is launching new flights from Glasgow to the German capital – just in time for the Christmas markets, which start from mid-November.

Where to stay?

Quirky Hotel-Pension Funk (hotel-pensionfunk.de) is designed to give you a feel of 'the golden 20s' of Berlin. B&B doubles from €52 (£37).

Get there now!

Ryanair flies Glasgow-Berlin three days a week from 28 October. Returns from around £68; ryanair.com

Or how about these...

From 25 October, British Airways will fly Heathrow-Reykjavik thrice weekly. Returns from £74; ba.com (see p137 for more on Iceland's geysers).

From 23 October, easyJet will fly Vienna-Luton twice weekly. Returns from £59; easyjet.com.

DVD

3 WATCH THIS... Theeb Out 12 Oct



The *Wanderlust*-loved landscapes of Jordan's Wadi Rum and Wadi Araba are the backdrop for this tale of a young Bedouin boy coming of age

during the First World War, as he's charged with guiding a British officer through the danger-laden desert. Shot on location, this is a classic adventure that conceals a muscular emotional punch.

Cinema

4 SEE THIS... Everest Out in cinemas and IMAX 18 Sept



If ever there was a mountain deserving of IMAX treatment, it's Everest. The big cameras are out for this epic recounting of the tragic trio of storm-blighted expeditions in May 96, recounted in books such as Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air*. Everest and Basecamp are the big stars here, with Jake Gyllenhaal and Josh Brolin among the climbers.

Gear

5 BUY THIS... Sherpa Nepal Relief Tee £25, sherpaadventuregear.co.uk



Buying a new travel T-shirt is great. Putting it on knowing you're helping rebuild mountain villages in Nepal is even better. If you buy *any* Sherpa item, a proportion of the money helps educate local children; buy this particular new tee and 100% of your cash goes to Nepal Relief. New clothes never felt so good.

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World Food

EAT THIS...



DID YOU KNOW?

In the USA, 4 October 2015 is National Taco Day. In 2014, Americans ate over 4.5 billion tacos, roughly equal the weight of two Empire State Buildings.

6 Eat your way into the Mexican soul

The French have crêpes, Brits have sandwiches, Italians have paninis and Mexicans have tacos.

Forget quesadillas, enchiladas and fajitas, tacos are the number one dish in Mexico. These folded and filled corn tortillas are supremely popular and incredibly versatile – locals enjoy them for lunch or dinner, on the way home from a night out or socially with friends. And everything you can imagine has been tried and tested as a taco stuffing, with every single region of Mexico having its favourites.

For example, piglet tacos are king in the state of San Luis Potosí; lobster and beans are the combo of choice in Baja California (unsurprisingly, given its long stretches of coast); in Hidalgo they even stuff their tacos

with worms. Nothing goes to waste either: in the state of Nayarit, the cheek, tongue, eyeballs and lips of a cow are all stewed together for a delightfully beefy filling.

There is a near-endless list of possibilities, but capital Mexico City is home to one of the most popular: Tacos Al Pastor (*see recipe*). But even if you're still wondering where to start, don't worry about it too much. "All a good taco needs is the ability to roll up a good tortilla," say Déborah Holtz and Juan Carlos Mena, co-authors of *Tacopedia*, a tribute to Mexico's streetfood king.

Whatever you stuff your tortilla with, you're eating your way into the Mexican psyche, Déborah reckons: "Tacos are one of the most definitive traits of Mexico: it's a unique portrait of an entire culture."

TACOS AL PASTOR

Serves 4

1kg pork steak, sliced very thinly
500ml annatto marinade (*see below*)
Corn oil, if frying
Sea salt
6-12 corn tortillas, 7-11cm wide
Garnish (eg pineapple chunks, chopped onion, lime wedges, fried green onions, guacamole, chipotle, Mexican salsa)

For the annatto marinade:

1 dried sweet guajillo chile
30ml corn oil
65g chopped onion
2 cloves garlic
1 tablespoon achiote paste
1 tablespoon sugar
3 black peppercorns
1 tablespoon dried oregano
2 whole cloves
½ tablespoon ground cumin
½ tablespoon ground cinnamon
A pinch of ground anise
1 allspice berry
250ml fresh orange juice
Sea salt and apple cider vinegar

To make the marinade

1. Fry chiles in oil over a low heat for 2-3 minutes until crispy (but not bitter). Remove the seeds.
2. Grind chiles, onion, garlic, sugar and spices in a blender until well combined.
3. Add orange juice, salt and a few drops of vinegar to blender; pulse to combine.

Method

1. Place meat in marinade. Cover and refrigerate for at least 3 hours.
2. Roast the meat on the grill or a griddle for a little more than 1 minute, or until golden brown. (If not working with a grill, sauté the meat in a skillet with a little oil. The steaks should be cooked individually for the best results.)
3. On a cutting board, slice the meat into strips, season, and keep warm.
4. Serve on the warm tortillas with a selection of garnishes.

NB: You can swap the pork for chicken, rabbit, fish, aubergine or courgette



Excerpted from *Tacopedia* (Phaidon, £20) by Déborah Holtz and Juan Carlos Mena; foreword by Rene Redzepi



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7 What's On UK EVENTS

WANDERLUST WORLD GUIDE AWARDS

London, 13 Oct

www.worldguideawards.com
Royal Geographical Society, SW7 2AR.
Doors 6.30pm for 7.15pm. Tickets £5
(including a drink), available via our
website or by calling 01753 620426.

Rub shoulders with the planet's best travel guides and meet the judges – including Bill Bryson – and the *Wanderlust* team at our annual World Guide Awards. Expect some laughter and incredible stories in this heartwarming evening, before the announcement of the coveted awards. And then enjoy a free drink and a natter with the team in our bar.

TRAVELS IN CANADA EVENING

London, 21 Oct

wanderlustmagazine.co.uk/wexascanada
One Birdcage Walk, SW1H 9JJ.
Doors 6.15pm for 7.00. Tickets free – email
WexasCanada@wanderlust.co.uk

Wanderlust's Lyn Hughes and Phoebe Smith reveal their Canada highlights in a fun, informative evening guaranteed to give you itchy feet. You can then talk (over wine and canapes) to specialists from Wexas Travel and also from Canada's provinces, stay-options and experiences, including the Rocky Mountaineer train.

FAMILY TRAVEL SHOW

London, 31 Oct-1 Nov

www.familytravelshow.com
Olympia, London, W14 8UX. Day tickets
£12 (£8 in advance), weekend £15,
under-16s go free. Doors: 10am

The brand new Family Travel Show will be brimming with ideas to suit every

home – from intrepid adventures to thrilling wildlife safaris. Celebrity speakers, travel bloggers and industry experts will all give talks and tips to help inspire your next venture. And we'll be there too: *Wanderlust* readers can get half-price tickets (£6) when booked in advance – quote 'Wanderlust' when booking online or by phone (0844 209 7360). Ten free pairs of tickets are also up for grabs – visit www.wanderlust.co.uk/ competitions for more details.

LECTURE: DOUG SCOTT

Oxford, 23 Sept

www.canepal.org.uk
Sheldonian Theatre, Broad Street, Oxford, OX1 1BX. Tickets from £12.50 and starts at 7pm. For tickets, visit the website.

Forty years after being part of the first team to conquer Mount Everest by its massive South West Face, mountaineer Doug Scott will recollect the dangerous experience that led him to the top of the world's highest peak. The talk will include musings from other expedition members, including legendary leader Sir Chris Bonington. The night also serves as a fundraiser, as the feat inspired Doug to set up Community Action Nepal – Nepalese goods will be on sale, while signed framed mountain prints will be auctioned.

ALPKIT BIG SHAKEOUT FESTIVAL

Derbyshire, 25-27 Sept

www.alpkit.com/bigshakeout
Thornbridge Outdoors Centre, Great Longstone, Bakewell, Derbyshire, DE45 1NY. Individual weekend passes are £60; family passes cost £140;



For tickets, visit the website. Some courses cost extra.

Bikes, hikes, abseiling and lakes... whatever sort of adventure floats your kayak, pack your tent for the Peak District. Paddle down the Derwent River, lace up your walking boots and tackle trails across the dales and even go underground in caves. Bushcraft activities are available for younger ones, but some activities across the weekend might incur added costs. Price includes a free evening meal on the Saturday and live music and lectures, too.

SPEAKERS FROM THE EDGE:

BEN FOGLE

Various locations, 28 Sept-23 Oct
www.speakersfromtheedge.com

In 'Call of the Wild', intrepid presenter Ben Fogle recounts his journey from being a self-confessed urbanite to adventure travel star. He'll verbally walk the audience through his first travelling foray across South America, which only led to greater, tougher challenges – rowing the Atlantic Ocean, crossing Antarctica on foot and running across the Sahara, among others.

BRISTOL WILDERNESS LECTURES

Bristol, Oct

www.wildernesslectures.com
Chemistry Theatre, University of Bristol.
From 7.30pm tickets from £8.50.

7 Oct Author Hugh Thomson will be pitching questions to fellow writer and travel legend Dervla Murphy as he delves into her extraordinary career.

21 Oct Founder of Australia Desert Expeditions Andrew Harper presents 'Last Man Walking', his 4,600km solo trek across the Tropic of Capricorn in Australia, while also reflecting on 150 years of desert exploration.

GLOBETROTTERS CLUB

Chester, 17 Oct

<http://globetrotters.co.uk>
The Eagle, 18 Castle Street, CH1 2DS.
Meeting is free and starts at 2pm.
Contact 01244 638026 or
chesterbranch@globetrotters.co.uk.

Swap tales of adventure and share the latest travel news with fellow adventurers at the regular meeting of the Chester Globetrotters that's held on the third Saturday of every other month.

8 The Big Debate

Should you travel long-haul with children aged under 10?

With many people shelving their ambitious travel plans once they have kids and waiting till they get older (see p12) – fearing price, security or public meltdowns – we asked if you'd take your children with you when you set off for the next big trip?



YES

Erin Bender, family travel blogger (travelwithbender.com)

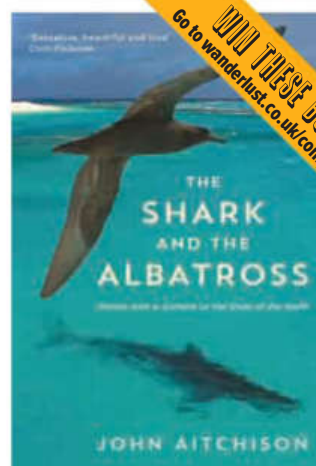
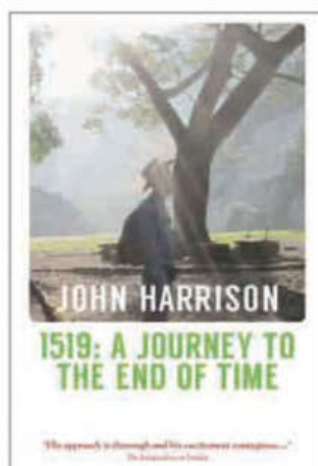
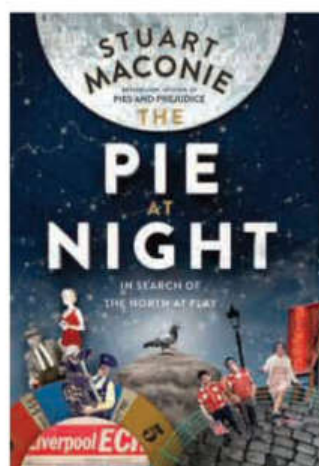
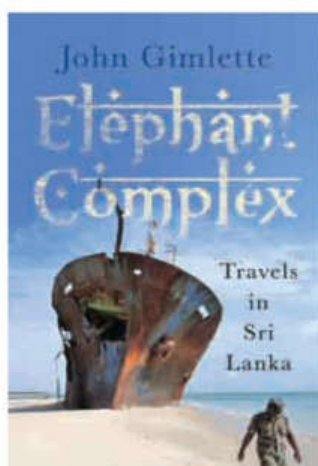
"It's not as expensive as you think: kids often sleep in the same room, share meals and fit in the same hire car. Children are far better travellers than we adults as they are so much more adaptable to changing environments and can sleep absolutely anywhere! Most importantly – they do remember and travel is creating who they are and who they will be. It's teaching them a global responsibility and a higher education to boot. I'm biased, but I'm also in the know: I travel with my five and six-year-old kids full time and have done so for the last three years non-stop. Do them a favour, travel with your kids."



NO

Hannah Martin, from working-mum advice website
Talented Ladies Club (www.talentedladiesclub.com)

"By the time my son was 10, he'd visited Indonesia, Australia and the USA. The trip to Sumatra at 18 months was hell. He didn't sleep on the overnight flight, picked up everything dangerous within sight and returned home with the souvenir of giardia. And to add insult to injury, he remembers nothing of the trip. But by five (Oz) and nine (Florida) it was different. He loved the in-flight movies and exploring countries. So would I do it again? From age five, when they can entertain themselves on a flight and remember it all, yes. But younger than that? I'd stick to closer (and safer) destinations."



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■ Read this...

9 You can travel away the clichés

Sri Lanka isn't just eles and the North doesn't mean wellies... this month's books get the real story behind some celebrated travels

John Gimlette obviously has a taste for the planet's murkier moral corners. But after the writer's last book *Wild Coast* took him to South America's slavery-blighted northeast, you'd think he was taking it easier by heading to Sri Lanka. But *Elephant Complex* (Quercus, £20) doesn't opt for the usual 'teardrop-shaped', wildlife-rich platitudes, as Gimlette also takes the time to investigate its grim history, colonial hangovers and child prostitution. It's another excellent, flinty eyed bit of travel journalism.

There's a little more sentiment as Stuart Maconie returns to his favoured stomping grounds. *The Pie At Night* (Ebury, £17) finds Maconie musing and amusing on what the modern Northerner does in his rec time – beer, bands, beaches, balls or walking boots – and using it as his launch pad to wryly ruminate further on life at the top of the M1.

John Harrison's civilization of choice is the Aztecs, tracing the footsteps Cortés left in Mexico nearly 500 years ago – a time drenched in apocalyptic rumour. But Harrison's own mission also has a death sentence cast over it: the writer's cancer diagnosis makes *1519: A Journey To The End Of Time* (Parthian, £11), his mix of historical context and modern travelogue, all the more compelling.

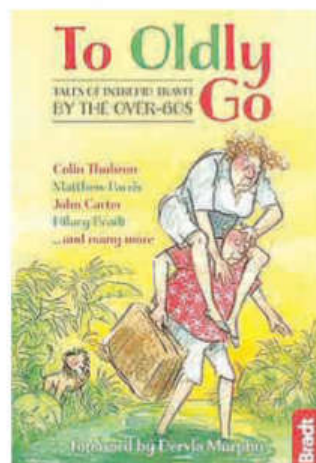
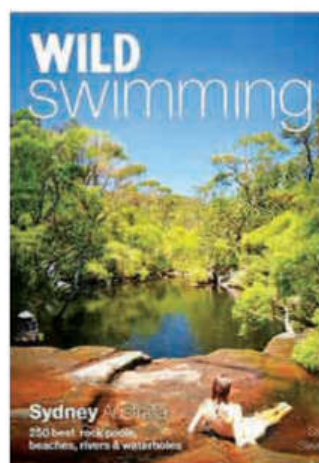
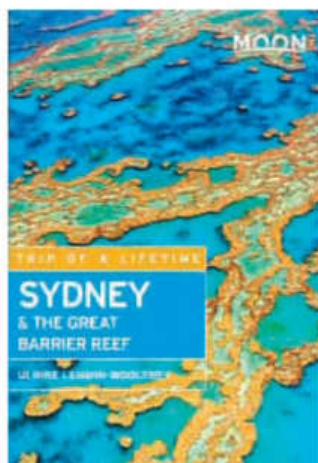
As lensman for the BBC's *Frozen Planet*, you'd expect John Aitchison to deliver essential images but the words are just as gripping. *The Shark And The Albatross* (Profile, £18) collects his tales of the planet's extremes and is full of insight into not only his own work but also the lives – and deaths – of the often-endangered animals he's snapping.

Two new guidebooks wade into Sydney's waters. *Moon: Sydney & the Great Barrier Reef* (Moon, £14) skews towards wilder

experiences, especially diving. *Wild Swimming: Sydney* (Wild Things, £17) takes you further off the well-swum streams, directing you to 250 great splashing spots away from that inimitable harbour.

A different travel icon gets a retrospective this month. Sixty years after the supersonic dream began, and 15 after the disaster in Paris ended it, Jonathan Glancey's *Concorde* (Atlantic Books, £20) recounts the story of the distinctive airliner and the technology, politics and passions that enabled its flight into history.

Another set of sexagenarians get a book dedicated to them, *To Oldly Go* (Bradt Travel Guides, £11) collects tales of often-misguided meanderings from some celebrated bus-pass users revealing that the planet's muddier waters aren't just for journos... and that age doesn't necessarily confer wisdom. (For more about over 60s adventuring, head to p12).



10

■ Five minutes with...

PAUL THEROUX HAS REFOUND HIS MOJO

The acclaimed travel writer explains how he rediscovered the 'old way' of travel by hitting the roads, churches and gun shows of the Deep South

We've known you on trains and tuk-tuks, but this time you just got in your car...

The one great thing about travelling in the States, which is not true of many other countries, is you can simply get in a car and go. Down the open road you will always find a place to eat, a place to stay, something to eat; you'll be in good shape.

You have gone off the beaten track in Africa and Asia over the years. Did this trip still do the same for you?

More so! I felt more freedom, greater depth in terms of meeting people, getting to know them, getting to know the place and returning. The book's subtitle is 'Four Seasons on Back Roads'. I went in the fall, again in winter and again in the spring. I looked up the same people, found out how they were doing.

It's different from the conventional travel book, which is just about going from one place to another and involves some kind of a struggle; you know someone going to Xanadu or Shangri-La and they make a meal of it. Travelling the States is not about a struggle so it's not that kind of travel book.

It's really about meeting people, getting to know them and getting them to trust you enough so that they'll talk to you. People are friendly in the South so that helps but still you need to turn on the charm, you need to make friends, and I think the result is very satisfying – more than any other trip that I can think of.

It's not about a shake down at the airport, being treated as a suspicious person. You go through all this argy-bargy at the airport and get on a plane and the plane is horrible; all planes are horrible.

Is that the main way that travel's changed for you in the last 50 years?

Yeah. 9/11 changed how people were treated. Some security people became a little bit too intrusive, reminding you that you're just a little person. That's not what I experienced on this trip. I rediscovered what travel should be – liberating, enlightening and shouldn't involve being interrogated.

Did you appreciate that before you first set off?

One of the great thrills in travel is to go to a place you've never been and find it really

fascinating. It was easy to get to the South; I got in my car, I had extra clothes, I had a case of wine, I had a knife – all this stuff that you can't take on a plane. And I just got in and sailed down the road, down the proud highway. No, I didn't know what to expect but what I found was so pleasant, so liberating.

Rural America is another place altogether. It's impoverished to a large extent, particularly the rural South but people want to share their stories. They feel hard done by and they want to tell you how things were. So I didn't know what to expect but when I found it I thought I want to keep doing this, I want to keep travelling.

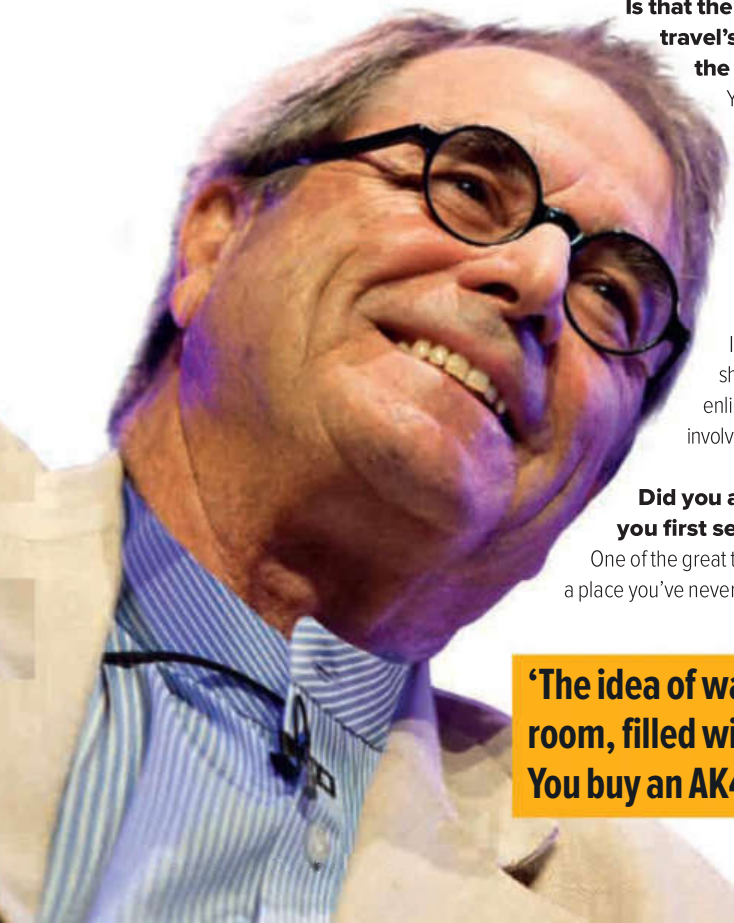
What motivated you to go on the trip?

I had no particular plan in mind. My last travel book was called *The Last Train to Zona Verde* and I went from Cape Town as far as I could go north – Congo, Nigeria, Angola, and I thought, 'What am I seeing? What am I learning?' I kept seeing cities that are distressed and economically poor people. No one wants to stay. There's a chapter in *The Last* called 'What Am I Doing Here?' where you'll see the motivation in why I wanted to travel in the States.

I wanted to see something new and I wanted to re-experience the liberation and enlightenment that you feel in travel. I thought of going to Alaska, I thought of going to Mexico. But it occurred to me that I hadn't seen much of the South and after my initial travel there, I realised this is a real place, it has a past, it has a present.

I thought I'm going to go to churches, I'm going to go to gun shows, I'm going to go to football games and I'll talk to people. I've got all the time in the world. I'll drive around, stay in a town, get to know people. And it's the old kind of travel except I was doing it in my own country.

'The idea of walking in to a gun show and seeing an enormous room, filled with tables piled with guns, to me is amazing. You buy an AK47, walk out to your car with it and drive off'



Stars & bars (& cars)
Paul's road trip – and many return journeys – took him through many of the conflicted old Confederate states



You comment how Americans can be much more challenging to meet and more foreign than other people.

I was struck just how people in the South always say hello; you might think all Americans say hello, but they don't. I could go to my local post office and say hello to people and they'll look at me as if I'm drunk.

It's not odd for a British person to think that all Americans are quite similar but Americans are quite different, regionally different. There's also large immigrant communities in the south, and they tend to run the motels and the petrol stations. They've got their own culture and I didn't know that. All of that was new to me and was worth exploring.

What surprised you the most?

I suppose what surprised me was the long memory that people have in the south of the Civil War. But probably, most of all, was the impoverishment of the South. The economy in the deep South is terrible, especially in towns that lost their industries to China, India and Mexico; so outsourcing has destroyed the economy. People like Bill Gates say they want to find a way of lifting people out of poverty. Well the way you lift people out of poverty is you give them employment.

Apple has lifted people out of poverty in China, in Bangladesh, in India, right? So it's a paradox. Companies that have left looking for cheap sweatshop underpaid labour have really done a great disservice. It's unforgivable what they've done, they've destroyed communities.

To see how poor parts of the south are, the Delta for example, parts of Alabama, Mississippi and Arkansas, parts of South Carolina... it's really disgraceful.

There was a passage where you were talking to somebody whose son had gone and volunteered in Zambia to help people...

Yeah, that was in Alabama. Her son was helping poor people in Zambia and I say what about Greensboro, Alabama? Funny huh? When a billionaire says he's going lift people out of poverty because he's made his billions by underpaying people in China he doesn't really get a medal from me. You know Nike trainers are made in Vietnam? Make them here.

You spent quite a lot of time visiting both churches and gun shows. So why the gun shows?

Because it's exotic to me; in the north we have flea markets, we have garage sales, but the idea of walking in and seeing an enormous room, filled with tables piled with guns, to me is amazing. Although some of them require background checks and fingerprints, others will just say, 'This is a private sale, do you wanna buy this AK47?' And you say, 'Yeah, how much?' And you'll walk out to your car [with it] and drive off.

People at gun shows have one thing on their mind and that's guns – and the guns relate to freedom, their lives and their attitude towards politics. It's really a symbol of their sense of freedom.

It's a day out for people. You often see a family with little kids, traipsing along. Mostly white, you don't see many African Americans. They also sell other stuff; knives and Nazi memorabilia and Civil War memorabilia. It's like an antique market. So they have food, they have drinks, but you're not

allowed to have a loaded gun. As you can imagine people are very polite at a gun show!

You said there weren't African Americans there; do you think if you'd been travelling around as one it would have been a very different experience?

Yes, I would have got different responses from people. But if you're an African American in Glasgow you'd have a different story.

When people found out I was from the north they had different reactions, some were slightly hostile, some more sympathetic. Everyone has a different reaction to who you are, where you come from.

The great thing was that I was talking to people in my own language. I've travelled in India, China, Russia, the Pacific, South America... and it's always another language, not my own. Also I had my car; where can you just get your car and go? That liberating sense that I mentioned earlier is very strong.

You did go back several times; what was it that drew you back?

What drew me back was curiosity, making friends and wishing to find out more.



Deep South: Four Seasons on Back Roads, by Paul Theroux with pictures by Steve McCurry, published by Hamish Hamilton (£20), is out now. For the full version of this interview, head online to wanderlust.co.uk/160

Instant Expert

KNOW YOUR... HERMANUS WHALE FESTIVAL

Land lovers
Spot southern right whales from the Walker Bay coastline



11

October means it's time for South Africa's mighty mammal fest, held in one of the world's best places to spot whales from land

For three days every year, the sleepy town of Hermanus on South Africa's Western Cape comes alive as people flock here to catch a glimpse of its most famous visitors: southern right whales. The Hermanus Whale Festival (2-4 October) is one of the top whalewatching events in the world, celebrating the whales that migrate here from the Antarctic between June and December to mate and breed.

So can I see the whales?

Hermanus sits on Walker Bay, a 90-minute drive west of Cape Town and one of the best locations in the world for land-based whalewatching – you may spot whales rearing their young in the shallow waters just metres offshore. Look out from the 12km Cliff Path, which stretches from New Harbour to Grotto

Beach; along the trail are various coves and inlets where whales love to laze. Hermanus also has the world's only whale crier, who wanders the cliffs on the look out and blows his kelp horn when he spots cetaceans.

If you're keen to leave the land, take a boat trip or paddle out in a sea kayak with expert guides – the playful whales may come close. Or take a Cessna over Walker Bay – you'll likely see southern rights as around 100 come to Hermanus each year.

Is the festival just whales?

Absolutely not. There's a raft of marquees house arts and crafts stalls, with ceramics, pottery and glass blowing all on show. If you're feeling peckish, take your pick from local gnosh such as biltong and *boerewors* (spiced sausage) and South African beers and ciders.

What about further afield?

Hit the trails in the Fernkloof Nature Reserve, nestled in the Kleinrivier Mountains above Hermanus. More than 1,400 species of plants make up the *fynbos* (shrubland) here; also keep an eye out for baboons, porcupines, buzzards and black eagles. Alternatively, make the 90-minute drive to Cape Agulhas, the southernmost point in Africa. Its namesake national park is home to Cape platanna frogs, African black oystercatchers and damara terns.

What else should I know?

Look out for other members of the 'marine big five': African penguins, Cape fur seals, great white sharks and bottlenose dolphins. And if you can't make the event, there's a live stream online. whalefestival.co.za.

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12 START PLANNING FOR WINTER

PICKY TRAVELLER

Know when you want to travel but don't know where? Got an activity you long to try but not sure how? Try Wanderlust's Trip Finder: mytripfinder.co.uk



Winter is coming... But how you deal with it is up to you.

Some travellers choose to embrace the cold, heading to destinations that are at their snowy best; others prefer to escape to warmer climes. So, whether you're a Jack Frost or a winter-sun-seeker, one of these nine trips will be perfect for you.

1. Sweden

Traverse the Arctic Circle by husky

Get well off the beaten pawtracks on **Fred Holidays' Dogsled the Arctic Circle** expedition. Meet your team of huskies and learn to mush them across a sparkling wilderness of icy lakes and alpine forests. Pass a ghostly abandoned village, whizz alongside rivers, look up to snowy peaks, stay in remote cabins and camp out on an island on frozen Lake Sautosjarvi in a traditional Sami *lavvu* (tent). Finish with a visit to the spectacular sculptural suites at the famed ICEHOTEL.

Who: Fred Holidays (0808 163 5880, fredholidays.co.uk)

When: 14 Feb, 21 Feb & 6 Mar 2016

How long: 7 days

How much: From £2,599 (incl flights)

2. Antarctica

Celebrate Christmas on ice

Fancy a guaranteed white Xmas? Want to spend the festive season with penguins? **Aurora Expeditions' Christmas in Antarctica** expedition will deliver both, plus midnight sun – giving you unlimited hours for watching wildlife. December is penguin breeding season, so watch the birds getting frisky. You can even kayak among them, or spend a night camping on the ice, before popping champagne on the sparkliest Christmas Day ever.

Who: Aurora Expeditions (1800 637688, auroraexpeditions.com.au)

When: 19 Dec 2015, 17 Dec 2016

How long: 11 days

How much: From £4,975 (excl flights); £635 for optional kayaking

3. Burma

See the Golden Land on two wheels

Pedal the classic sights, detour into remote spots and bypass the rainy season on an all-encompassing **Cultural Cycling Tour of Burma with Mountain Kingdoms**. Explore Bagan's temples, follow the Irrawaddy River, venture out to the old British hill stations of Kalaw and Pwin Oo Lwin, and visit the Shan village of Hsipaw. Use both bikes and boats to navigate Inle Lake, then delve into the pagoda-littered Sagaing hills, and wander Mandalay, Lashio and Yangon on foot.

Who: Mountain Kingdoms (01453 844400, mountainkingdoms.com)

When: 8 Nov 2015 & 6 Feb 2016

How long: 17 days

How much: From £3,370 (incl flights)



4. Cuba

Escape winter in the cool Caribbean

Explore the Caribbean island (at your own pace) before it changes forever on **Journey Latin America's Self-drive Cuba: Best of the West** tour – avoiding the island's hurricane season to boot. Wander Havana's colonial quarter, take in the limestone mountains of the Viñales Valley and explore the Sierra del Rosario Biosphere Reserve, before pitstopping at elegant Cienfuegos and the UNESCO-listed city of Trinidad.
Who: Journey Latin America (020 3603 2866, journeylatinamerica.co.uk)
When: Tailormade
How long: 13 days
How much: From £1,741 (incl flights)

5. USA

See wildlife with a snowy backdrop

See wintry Yellowstone National Park in the company of award-winning pro-photographer Nick Garbutt, your guide on **Wildlife Worldwide's Wild West Winter Wonderland** tour. He'll give you top tips on snapping everything from

frost-covered bison in the wild Lamar Valley to steaming Mammoth Hot Springs, Old Faithful geyser, Madison Valley's snowy gorges, frozen waterfalls and – maybe – wolves padding amid the white.
Who: Wildlife Worldwide (01962 302086, wildlifeworldwide.com)
When: 15 Jan 2016
How long: 16 days
How much: From £5,195 (incl flights)

6. Italy

Indulge on the Amalfi Coast

Yes, it's a bit cooler on the Amalfi Coast in winter, but it's also a lot quieter. **G Adventures' Local Living Italy** trip sees you get cosy at a rustic farmhouse and live like an Italian for a week. Explore the archaeological treasures of Pompeii and hike the 'Walk of the Gods' along the Amalfi clifftops. Also, learn how to make three of the Italy's most famous exports: mozzarella, limoncello and pizza.
Who: G Adventures (0344 272 2060, gadventures.com)
When: Selected dates, Dec 2015-Mar 2016
How long: 8 days
How much: From £849 (excl flights)

7. Spain

Trek delightful, diverse Gran Canaria

Find winter sun while ducking summer crowds on **Headwater's Walking on Gran Canaria** trip. The hiking terrain is wonderfully varied, with trails leading via the volcanic monolith of Roque Nublo, deep-blue Chira Dam lake, the lush greens of the Azuaje Nature Reserve, the cave village of Artenara (the highest in the island), the dazzling-white village of Firgas and cosmopolitan capital Las Palmas.
Who: Headwater (01606 828431, headwater.com)
When: Selected Mondays, Oct 2015-Apr 2016
How long: 8 days
How much: From £979 (incl flights)

8. Norway

Watch whales with Mark Carwardine

Large pods of orca head to north Norway in winter to feed, joining humpback, fin and sperm whales. **Discover The World's Orcas and Aurora with Mark Carwardine** tour will see the whale expert and photographer guide you (and your camera) on three fjord outings. The

dark winter months also maximise chances of spotting the northern lights – you'll spend two evenings hunting the phenomenon on land.

Who: Discover The World (01737 214250, discover-the-world.co.uk)
When: 22 & 26 Jan 2016
How long: 4 nights
How much: From £1,745 (incl flights)

9. Russia & China

Travel through Siberia to the Ice City

Take coldness to the limit on a winter expedition to Siberia. Board the **Trans-Siberian Express** for **The Russia Experience's Classic Snow Train: Moscow to Beijing** trip. You'll stop at Harbin, the 'St Petersburg of China', for its annual ice festival, a glitter of snow sculptures and spectacular illuminations.
Who: The Russia Experience (0845 521 2910, trans-siberian.co.uk)
When: 31 Dec 2015, 7, 14, 21 & 28 Jan 2016, 4 & 11 Feb 2016
How long: 12 days
How much: From £1,540 (excl flights)

MORE ONLINE We couldn't fit all the best winter trips on these pages! So, to see even more, go to wanderlust.co.uk/160



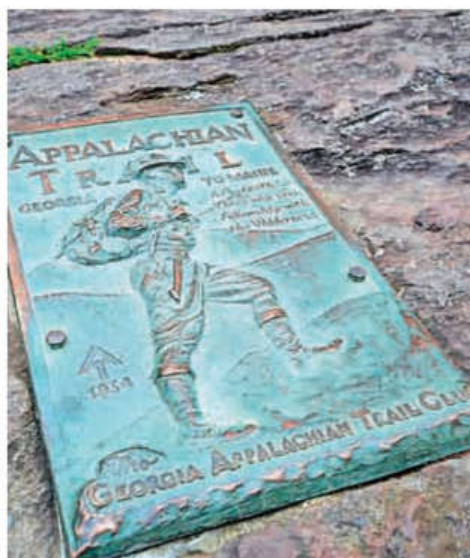
A WALK IN THE WOODS

Want to experience the Appalachian Trail but don't have time to hike it all? Forget the backpack and blisters – grab a car, turn on the cruise control and check out the best bits in just two weeks...

WORDS **PHOEBE SMITH** PHOTOGRAPHS **NEIL S PRICE**

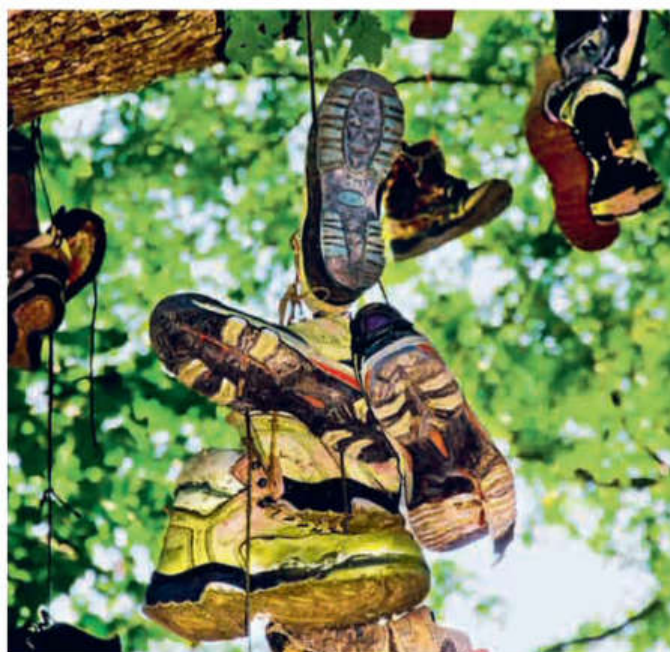
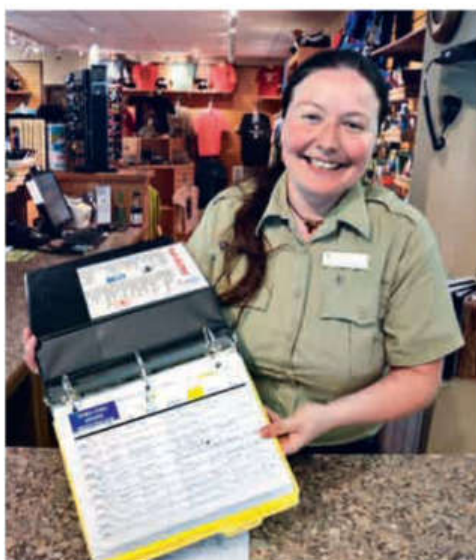
**New York
state of mind**
From the top of Bear
Mountain, the AT
continues on for over
a thousand miles

Appalachian Trail, USA



Books, Bryson and boots...

Reading up on Bill Bryson's route at Amicalola Falls Lodge (far left) where many walkers sign in with Interpretive Manager Heather Wilson (bottom left); the sign on Springer Mountain that marks the start of the AT for walkers heading north (the most common direction); blown-out boots hang in the tree at Mountain Crossings; (right) the only way to tackle the AT is on foot... or is it?



After the first week my feet had grown from a size eight to a size 11," declared the girl – known unsurprisingly as Superfeet – over breakfast. "They were so swollen and purple that it wasn't new boots I needed, it was clown shoes," she happily continued as most of the other diners slowed their chewing. "And the blisters..." At this point the man next to me dropped the egg on his fork and made an excuse to leave the table.

Such is the conversation around the table of a hikers' hostel along the Appalachian Trail. Especially here in Monson, Maine. By

the time most northbound walkers have reached this point, they'll have hiked all the way from Georgia, over 2,000 miles, for the best part of 5-6 months, across 14 US states. Gone are the niceties of breakfast-appropriate small talk; by this stage, nothing is off limits. And even if it doesn't put you off your pancakes, it's more than enough to make any sane person vow never to thru-hike one of America's oldest long-distance paths.

Only 2,180 miles to go...

Thankfully blisters weren't something I had to worry about. I had already decided that walking that kind of distance was way beyond my capabilities, my budget and – more crucially – my annual leave allocation. Instead, using Bill Bryson's travel classic *A Walk in the Woods* as my inspiration (in which he decides, three states in, that the AT

is too large an undertaking and decides instead to do prime chunks of it), I'd already hired a car to drive the length of the trail instead, cherry picking the main highlights to explore on foot as I went.

"Sounds like a good idea to me," agreed Tom Lamb, member of the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club, as we hiked together up Springer Mountain, the trail's southern terminus, on the first day of my AT journey. Tom began walking the trail with his son Murray back in 2004, starting at the northern end on Katahdin mountain in Maine. He put in over 100 miles and 28 days but then decided to come home. "It became a job," he explained. "You're under time constraints and have to do the same thing every day no matter how you feel. Doing it in sections is much more fun – you can actually enjoy the experience." ►



‘Using Bryson’s travel classic, *A Walk in the Woods*, as inspiration I decided to drive the 2,180 mile length of the trail, cherry picking the main highlights to explore on foot as I went’

Wild woods

(clockwise) The stone summit shelter on the ominously named Blood Mountain, Georgia; the hikers' nickname for the Appalachian Trail is the 'green tunnel' and it's easy to see why; the highest point of the trail is Clingman's Dome, in the Smokies; a pileated woodpecker chows down; a black bear in Shenandoah National Park, Virginia



‘Lacing up my boots I hit the trail and within five steps from the

◀ We were certainly doing that now. Whereas most thru-hikers have to start at the more accessible Amicalola Falls State Park and hike an 8.5 mile approach trail before they even reach the official start of the route, we had made use of an unpaved forestry road to take us almost within a mile of Springer's summit. We strolled, in no particular hurry, with small, light daypacks on our backs. Cicadas hummed, a refreshing breeze tickled my neck, and slices of sunlight broke through the leaves and fragmented on the forest floor as though bouncing off a disco ball.

At the top a simple plaque informs you that thousands of miles of trail lie ahead, each marked by a rectangular white blaze.

Navigationally the AT isn't too technical an undertaking, but that doesn't mean that people don't drop out; statistically, of the

3,000 or so thru-hikers who start each year, only 25% finish. This was underlined at my next stop, 30 miles north: a hostel and gear shop called Mountain Crossings. Located on the first proper road to cross the AT, it offers an easy escape route for those who've already had enough. I arrived to find boots dangling from the tree branches and a noticeboard plastered with shuttle company adverts offering to rescue hikers from months of misery.

"We do get lots of drop outs here," said Jason Hulsey, one of the live-in staff, who has thru-hiked the trail. "Some of the boots in the tree are from people who gave up, but inside we hang the boots of those who made it all the way – like a hall of fame."

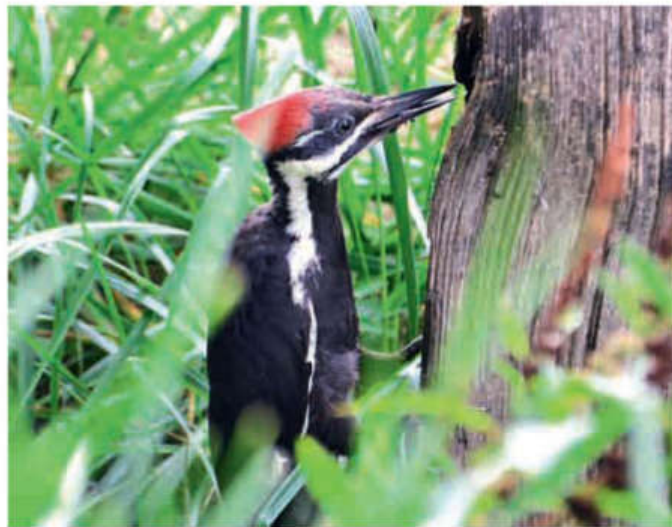
Eager to get some more boot-miles in myself, I laced mine up and hit the trail, bound for Blood Mountain. Within five

steps I had left the road and been swallowed up by trees. The AT is known as the 'green tunnel' as most of the route leads under branches; when the canopy parts to show open sky hikers get very excited. And I did too when, from the top of Blood Mountain, I had a view over the forest that seemed to stretch on forever.

Picking up the pace

Back in the car, I drove into North Carolina and stopped at Nantahala Outdoor Center. Here, in the hot summer sunshine, people were drifting down the river in inflatable tubes and restaurants bulged with hikers drinking beer, aptly brewed in Bryson City, while dangling their tired feet in the water.

After crossing Fontana Dam, the trail leaves the road and heads into the trees of Great Smoky Mountains National Park,



car park I had left the road and been swallowed up by trees'

where it constantly crosses between North Carolina and Tennessee. As I arrived, a thunderstorm blew in. The rain hammered on the hot tarmac with such ferocity that the road itself started to steam. When it eased I swapped tyres for trail once more and hiked up Clingman's Dome – the highest point on the whole AT – just in time to see the mountains before they disappeared into the darkening sky.

Leaving the Smokies a funny thing happens. Suddenly you're not in the woods anymore, but in a sprawling jungle of neon lights and concrete buildings: Gatlinburg. This was where Bryson realised just how long the AT is, and concluded he couldn't do the whole thing as a thru-hike. By now, I was on day four and felt like I'd made a good dent in the mileage; however, a few hours later in the small town of

Hot Springs – the first time I saw a map of the entire route – I realised I wasn't even a quarter of the way through. If I wanted to finish this, I would need to pick up the pace.

Before I left town, though, I stopped at Sunnybank Inn, one of the oldest hiker hostels on the trail. It's run by Elmer Hall, who walked the AT in 1976. "The biggest change has been in numbers," he explained as he creaked in a rocking chair on the porch, wafting away flies with his hand. "Back then there were only a handful of us doing it; maybe 30 people finished. We did it for the solitude, to be alone with nature, now it's much more of a social thing."

Living vicariously

The trail doesn't get more social than my next stop – Damascus, Virginia. Home to winemakers (who produce an Appalachian

Sunset rosé), breweries (whose trucks offer lifts to beer-deprived thru-hikers) and a top coffee shop (Mojoe's), Damascus is known as the friendliest town on the trail. So it wasn't surprising when I met a master brewer who told me he'd decided to stop thru-hiking three years ago and settle down here.

He's not the only one to find a place he loves via the trail. The next day I hiked up to perhaps the most iconic landmark on the AT – McAfee Knob – with Andrew Downs. After thru-hiking several years ago, Andrew opted not only to move closer to the path but got a job at the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, the organisation responsible for maintaining it.

This theme continued in Shenandoah National Park where – while watching a black bear mooching along just metres in front of me – I met a ranger called Woody. ►

Appalachian Trail, USA



Meet the Thru-Hikers

Every year around 3,000 people start on the Appalachian Trail intending to thru-hike it, only 1 in 4 will complete it. Even after they finish, most find some way of remaining on the trail – if only in spirit. We met some of them...

Clockwise from top left

A group of five thru-hikers we met at Pawling, New York – (from left) Trial and Error (a couple who were doing their first half starting in Pennsylvania and had only been on the trail 5 weeks), Whoopie and Squirt who'd met and fell in love on the trail (now 4 months into their hike), and John Wayne Jr (also 4 months in); the legendary Elmer, who thru-hiked back in the '70s before the proper path was established as it is today, now welcomes hikers to his hostel in Hot Springs; Frank 'Copperhead' Wright who thru-hiked it in 2000 and now volunteers to maintain the first (or the last) mile of the AT in Georgia; Little Bean and Gadget Girl currently walking the trail, who had met and become friends on the way; Murray 'Lazarus' Lamb who thru-hiked in 2004 after finishing 6 years of active service in the US Navy; Kim aka 'Hippie Chick' and Jarrod aka 'Poet' Hester with their daughter 'Little Chick' who thru-hiked in 2008 and now run Shaw's Hiker Hostel in Monson, Maine.

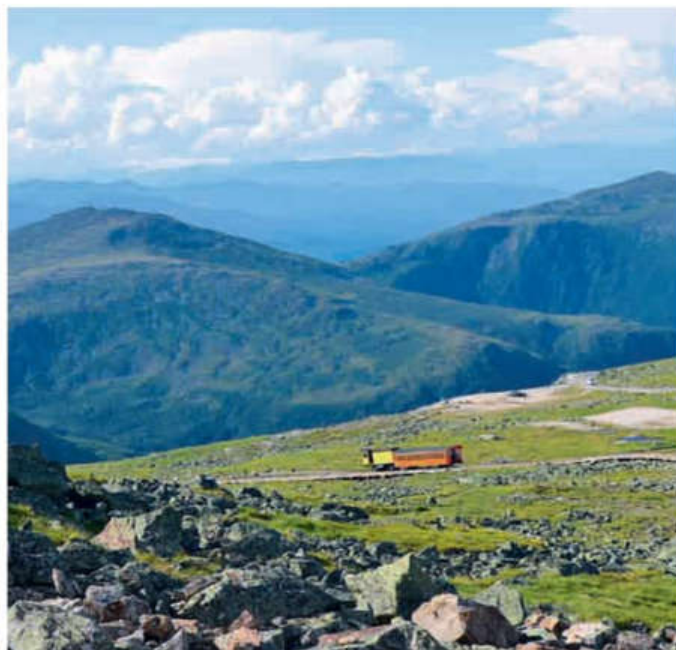


‘I had become a trail junkie – getting excited by every white blaze I spotted from behind the wheel, eager to pull over to tread parts of the pathway’



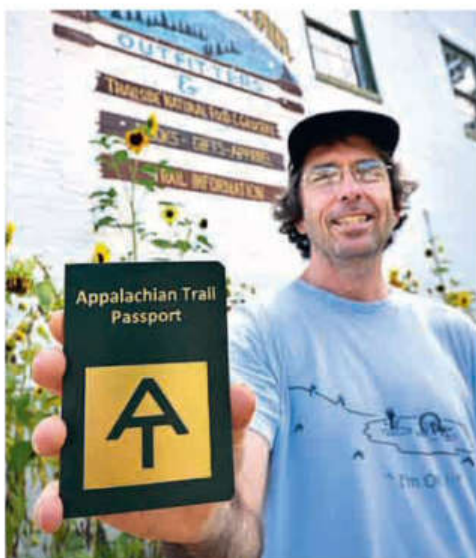
Rock star
Taking in the view
from McAfee Knob –
one of the most
famous landmarks
on the AT

Appalachian Trail, USA



Out of the woods

(clockwise from top left) The cog train on 'bald' Mount Washington dates back to 1868; some of the wildest woods on the trail are found in Baxter State Park, Maine; one of the halfway markers in Pennsylvania; Wayne Crosby of Bluff Mountain Outfitters, Hot Springs (who gave up his thru-hike 27 years ago to settle in the town), shows the AT passport hikers can get stamped as at points along the trail



◀ Now retired and living in Colorado, Woody volunteers here during the summer in order to meet thru-hikers. "I know I'll never do it myself, but I enjoy living vicariously through them," he confessed as we watched the large bear pad silently into the bushes.


In the state of West Virginia I got to do that myself when I met two thru-hikers who introduced themselves as Little Bean and Gadget Girl. They had arrived at the Appalachian Trail Conservancy HQ to have their photo taken and record their hike in the visitors' book, a tradition started in the 1970s. Having been on the road for the past four months, they had that distinct musty scent, common to every unwashed thru-hiker – it reminded me of off ketchup. Like most who walk the AT, their lives were at a crossroads: one had not got into grad school, the other had been laid off from work.

"Most people are going through a transition when they walk the trail," agreed Laurie Potteiger, who featured in Bryson's book and who thru-hiked in 1987. "But there are other reasons why people do it. When *Wild* came out, the film about the Pacific Crest Trail, we had an increase in numbers. And then there was what we call the 'Bryson effect' when his book came out; we expect numbers to increase further after the film."

Eager to beat the crowds I continued north, whisking through Maryland (where the trail crosses the freeway, via an arched metal bridge), Pennsylvania (home of the AT Museum where I learned about 'Grandma Gatewood' who thru-hiked solo in 1955, aged 67, in a pair of hi-top trainers) and New Jersey (where the mapping is so bad that a woman with a guidebook struggled to confirm even our car park location).

By the time I reached New York state I had become a trail junkie – getting excited by every white blaze I spotted from behind the wheel, eager to pull over to tread parts of the pathway. I did so at Bear Mountain, a popular weekend escape for Manhattanites who utilise the AT to reach the summit.

"They say around three million people visit a part of the trail each year," said Sona Mason from the New York Trail Conference, as we climbed up the well-worn path to the top (currently being re-routed due to erosion). Looking down at the swarms of city folk picnicking, swimming and dragging reluctant family members uphill in the heat, it looked like 2.99 million of them were here today. Around us wild bush turkeys clucked nosily as they fought to share the path too. It was all very beautiful, but I was keen to push on and lose the crowds. ▶



To greener pastures
The trail crosses
Bear Mountain Bridge
in New York state,
along with cars full
of Manhattanites
escaping the city



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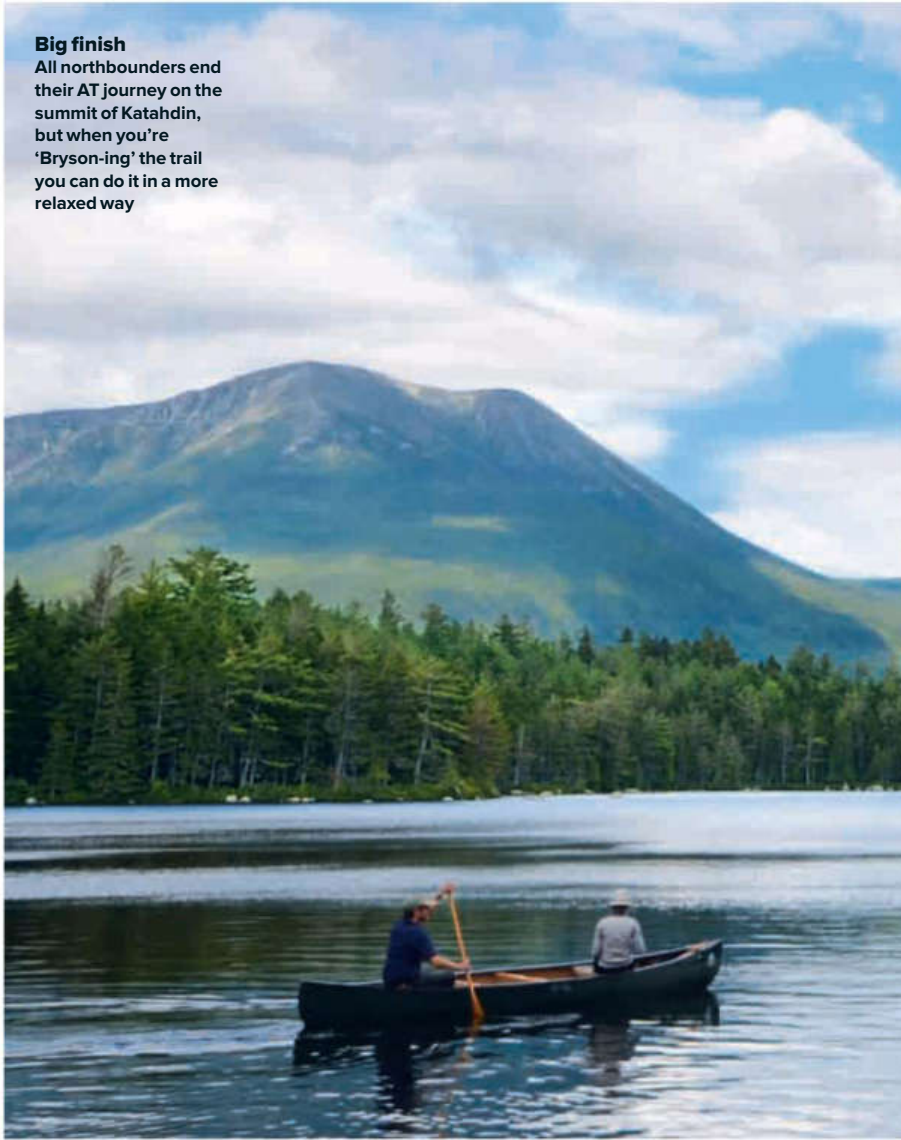


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Big finish

All northbounders end their AT journey on the summit of Katahdin, but when you're 'Bryson-ing' the trail you can do it in a more relaxed way



green blanket – I felt like I could reach out and smooth them with a single gesture.

On Washington's top is a museum explaining the extreme climate the mountain usually experiences. Outside I stood beneath the summit watching some thru-hikers approaching while the sun blazed overhead, illuminating the AT markers like white jewels, all pointing north.

The Maine event

With two days and one state left I had nearly finished – but Maine is a truly sprawling state. Its roads are slower, the distances between its towns greater and the towns themselves tiny. I was bound for Monson, a place where hikers are the lifeblood of the community. It sits on the edge of the 100 Mile Wilderness, an untamed expanse of trees, and the final big challenge for thru-hikers before they summit Katahdin.

"Hikers are different when they reach this point," said Kim Hester, who co-owns Shaw's Hiker Hostel with her husband Jarrod, and thru-hiked in 2008. "If they're going south they've just done the wilderness and are normally fairly quiet as they reflect on that and the journey ahead. If they're north-bounders, they're confident and less excited about talking to us about it."

I certainly found this to be true at breakfast. Everyone was more subdued – apart from our friend Superfeet, who delighted in shocking the non-thru-hikers with her blister stories. And, on my final day on the trail, I felt a little pensive myself, sad to be leaving what had become such a large part of my life for the past 14 days.

Due to bad weather, the summit of Katahdin eluded me. But I didn't want to give up, so in a final act of 'Bryson-ing' the trail, I decided to cover the last section by seaplane. As we soared, I saw two tiny dots – actually thru-hikers – disappear into the trees. Then the pilot gestured ahead: it was Katahdin, surrounded by a fluffy feather boa of cloud, every bit the showstopper.

Back on land, I was driving past the entrance to the 100 Mile Wilderness when a lone woman – a thru-hiker – stuck out her thumb. I pulled over and she hopped in. Having been starved of conversation for days, she was like a geyser, her words spewing out in an uncontrollable burst. She talked of moose encounters, lake swimming, falling asleep to rustling leaves and howling wolves, standing alone on mountain tops engulfed in wilderness. Indeed, she gushed effusively, non-stop, until she left the car. It was enough to make a perfectly sane person decide that one day, just maybe, they would in fact come back, minus the car, to attempt a thru-hike for themselves. ■

'I stood watching some thru-hikers while the sun blazed above, illuminating the AT markers like white jewels, all pointing north'

◀ Bald and beautiful

Following backroads, I plunged back into woodland. I caught glimpses of the trail as I bounded through Connecticut. I watched Appalachian hardwood trees merge into sub-alpine boreal forest on the summit of Massachusetts' Mount Greylock – capped, rather oddly, with a stone lighthouse. Then I temporarily lost my way when the AT joined and shared its route with Vermont's older 438 mile Long Trail.

However, the biggest highlight was waiting in New Hampshire. Ask most thru-hikers which is their favourite section of the trail (I did) and most name this state, and in particular the Franconia Ridge and the Presidential Range. Why? The absence

of trees. Indeed, even after 12 days I was looking forward to some 'bald' mountaintops.

With thunder hitting the Franconia Ridge, I set my sights on the highest of the Presidentials, Mount Washington – once said to be home to 'the worst weather in the world'. Today, however, it was basking in full sunshine.

The walk up would take a whole day, and the drive up was unappealing given my already epic-length road trip, so I opted to take the cog train. Dating back to 1868, it is one of the steepest rack railways in the world; moving at a little over 2.5 miles an hour, it was the perfect way to take in the scenery. Around me, treeless peaks spread out like a crumpled

Appalachian Trail, USA Footnotes

VITAL STATISTICS

Trail HQ: Harpers Ferry, West Virginia
Trail length: About 2,180 miles
States crossed: 14 (Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine)
Time: GMT-4 (Mar-Nov GMT-5)
Visas: UK nationals require an ESTA (US\$14; valid for two years; Apply at least 72 hours before travel; <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov/esta/>)
Money: Dollar (\$), around \$1.58 to the UK£

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

■ Start of thru-hiking season. North-bound hikers start early from Georgia to avoid summer heat; south-bounders wait until June for snow to clear in Maine.
■ Good weather in all states. Humid in south. Chance to meet thru-hikers.
■ **Fall** – Climbing Katahdin and camping in Baxter State Park restricted after 15 Oct.
■ **Winter** – Great for southern states or winter sports in north, not good for hiking.

➕ **Health & safety**
No jabs required. Do not attempt backcountry trails unless able to navigate well with map/compass. Be aware of bears, ticks and changeable weather. Always boil/treat stream water before drinking.

Further reading & information

A Walk in the Woods (1998) by Bill Bryson, a must read; the movie based on it is released 18 September
The Appalachian Trail (Rizzoli, 2012) by Brian B King – archive material and images atctrailstore.org – The Appalachian Trail Conservancy sells trail guides and maps discoveramerica.com – Invaluable resource for planning a USA trip nps.gov – US National Parks Service

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PLANNING GUIDES
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THE TRIP

✈ **Getting there**
Virgin Atlantic (virgin-atlantic.com) flies direct several times daily to both Atlanta (Georgia) and New York from London Heathrow. Prices start from £589 return; flight time from 7.5 hours.

🚗 **Getting around**
All major car hire companies can be found at Atlanta Airport. The author booked through **Affordable Car Hire** (affordablecarhire.com). Expect to pay around £480 to hire a compact car for 14 days, including one-way drop off charge and unlimited mileage.

Note, all distances here are given in miles rather than kilometres, as is standard in the USA.

£ **Cost of travel**
Petrol is **much cheaper** in the US than the UK. Expect to pay around \$2.60/gallon (£1.64). **Entrance fees** to National Parks range from free (Smokies) to \$20 (Shenandoah). Food and drink are also a little cheaper than the UK, prices vary state-to-state but expect to pay around \$10 (£6.30) for a main course and \$10-12 (£6-7.50) for a bottle of wine from a winery and around \$3 (£1.90) for a beer.

APPALACHIAN TRAIL IN 14 DAYS: State by state

Georgia
Stay: Artmore Hotel, Atlanta (artmorehotel.com), a great base from which to start an AT adventure.
Visit: Amicalola Falls State Park (amicalolafallsstatepark.com) features in the *Walk in the Woods* movie. The Approach Trail, which leads to the start of the AT, is here; browse the sign-in books to see who's currently hiking. Spend a night at the lodge, which has views over the forest.
Hike: Climb Springer Mountain, the start (or end) of the AT; the nearest town is charming Dahlonega.
Stop-off: Mountain Crossings at Neel Gap (mountaincrossings.com) – the AT cuts through the 1930s building. Buy a souvenir, then hike up Blood Mountain.
More info: exploregeorgia.org

North Carolina & Tennessee
Stay: Park Vista, Gatlinburg (parkvista.com) is a good base from which to explore the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, it offers views of the neon jungle and the

Trail blazing
Following the AT through Pennsylvania, one of the 14 states through which it passes



Smokies too. Further north check-in at Sunnybank Inn, Hot Springs (sunnybankretreatassociation.org) to meet the legendary Elmer who cooks gourmet organic vegetarian meals too.
Visit: Fontana Dam (tva.com) features in the film. Here you can follow the trail right across its top. Hike to the trail shelter known as the 'Fontana Hilton'.
Hike: Lots of day-walk options in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (nps.gov/grsm) including a hike to 2,025m Clingman's Dome (the AT's highest point).
Stop-off: Go to Hot Springs, North Carolina, where the AT runs down the main street; cross over, then visit Bluff Mountain Outfitters to buy a T-shirt stating you've walked the entire width of the trail.
More info: uk.visitnc.com; tnvacation.com

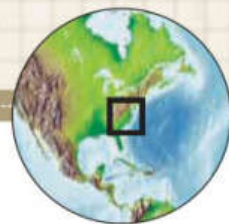
Virginia
Stay: Dancing Bear Bed & Breakfast in Damascus (melissatnc.wix.com/dancingbearrentals) is well located. While you're in town, go to Mojoe's, which serves the best coffee.
Visit: Shenandoah National Park (nps.gov/shen) offers plenty of walk options; stay at the wonderful Skyland Lodge (goshenandoah.com/lodging/skyland-resort) situated in the park itself. From Damascus, sample the Creeper Trail, a 35-mile downhill cycle route that continuously crosses the AT; Sundog Outfitter (sundogoutfitter.com) rents bikes and runs transfers.
Hike: Climb to McAfee Knob then celebrate with a tour and tasting at Parkway Brewing Company, Salem (parkwaybrewing.com).
Stop-off: Taste local tipples at Abingdon Winery (abingdonwinery.com), home of Appalachian Sunset wine, and Damascus

Brewery (thedamascusbrewery.com).
More info: virginia.org

West Virginia
Stay: Hillbrook Inn & Spa in Charles Town (hillbrookinn.com) is set in beautiful surrounds.
Visit: Harpers Ferry is home to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy HQ (appalachiantrail.org). Learn about the AT, meet volunteers and look through the archives, then explore the historic old town on foot.
Stop-off: Dish in Charles Town (wvdish.com) offers great food and live music.
More info: wvtourism.com

Pennsylvania
Stay: The Shawnee Inn in Shawnee (shawneeinn.com) can arrange canoe trips, island camping and AT section walks; it's about to launch glamping too.
Visit: The small Appalachian Trail Museum (atmuseum.org) in Pine Grove Furnace State Park is a fascinating insight into the AT's history and characters – a must visit.
Hike: Walk to the AT's halfway marker (near the museum), where you can sign a visitors' book.
More info: visitpa.com

New York
Stay: Manhattan's Soho Grand Hotel (sohgrand.com) is a good choice for your last night, before flying home.
Hike: Bear Mountain Inn (visitbearmountain.com) is perfectly placed for a hike up the eponymous peak. Stay overnight and wake early for a sunrise hike. Stroll to the Trailside Zoo, which houses animals that can't be returned to the wild; the zoo also marks the AT's lowest elevation point.



Stop-off: Visit Pawling, where the AT crosses a railroad where hikers can catch a train to Manhattan.
More info: iloveny.com

Massachusetts

Stay: Williams Inn, Williamstown (williamsinn.com), is 30 minutes from Mount Greylock.

Visit: Walk in Mount Greylock State Park, where the forest changes from Appalachian to sub-alpine boreal. Check out the oddly placed lighthouse on the summit.

More info: massvacation.com

New Hampshire

Stay: Highland Lake Lodge (outdoors.org) is one of the Appalachian Mountain Club's lodges, a great place to chat to walkers.

Visit: Hike, drive or take the train (thecog.com) to the summit of Mount Washington, weather permitting.

Hike: Walk up Mount Lafayette in Franconia Notch State Park (nhstateparks.org), taking in the Greenleaf Hut.

More info: visithn.gov

Maine

Stay: Shaw's Hiker Hostel (shawshikerhostel.com) is an institution, and the best place to chat about the AT with those who know it best.

Visit: Take a seaplane over the 100 Mile Wilderness with Currier's Flying School (curriersflying.com) for the best views of Katahdin mountain.

Stop-off: Lakeshore House in Monson (thelakeshorehouse.com) has long been serving meals to hungry thru-hikers.

More info: visitmaine.com



TRAIL VOCABULARY

Thru-hiker – A person walking the entire trail in one go (average time taken is 5-7 months)

Section hiker – A person completing the whole trail in sections, usually over a period of years

Trail name – The identity a hiker takes on the trail (this usually comes with an amusing backstory)

NOBO, SOBO, flip-flop – A Northbounder (walking Georgia-Maine, the more usual direction), a Southbounder (Maine-Georgia) or a person who starts in the middle, does one half, then returns to the middle to complete the other

Trail magic – When something happens at just the right time (eg someone gives you food when you've run out or gives you a ride into town)

Trail angel – The person who delivers the trail magic

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1

Qhapaq Ñan, Andean Road System

ARGENTINA, BOLIVIA, CHILE, COLOMBIA, ECUADOR & PERU

“Extraordinary network through one of the world’s most extreme geographical terrains” UNESCO World Heritage Committee

Visiting Qhapaq Ñan is a daunting prospect. This network of Andean roads was built by the Inca to connect their capital Cuzco to outposts of the empire as far afield as the Colombian sierra to the north and Santiago in the south. The system, which was trodden by message-relaying *chasqui* (runners), traders, soldiers, pilgrims and llama caravans, weaves across six countries, via high peaks, thick rainforests and arid deserts, covering some 30,000km.

At the moment it’s more an idea than a cohesive site – while masterful engineering has ensured much of the matrix is still intact, many pathways are overgrown. However, Qhapaq

Ñan’s inscription onto the UNESCO list in 2014 has spurred the six governments concerned to agree to cooperate on its preservation.

You can easily visit patches of it, though. Peru’s Inca Trail to Machu Picchu is the headline segment; other traceable bits include the highland route between Achupallas and Ingapirca in central Ecuador, the various strands around Rancagua in Chile, and Bolivia’s Takesi Trail, which starts near La Paz, crosses the Cordillera Real and dives down into the lush Yungas valleys.

SEE THE SITE: Head to Cuzco (itself UNESCO-listed) to pick up trails from the Qhapaq Ñan’s epicentre. Cuzco is a 70-minute flight from Lima.

LIKE THIS? TRY... Quebrada de Humahuaca, Argentina – the Rio Grande’s striking, technicolour valley has been used as a trade route for 10,000 years.



2

Los Glaciares National Park

PATAGONIA, ARGENTINA

“An area of exceptional natural beauty”

See the South Patagonian Ice Field at its most splendid. This UNESCO site encompasses 6,000 sq km of incredible iciness: around half of the park is covered in namesake glaciers, which ooze down rugged mountainsides and crash into blue-turquoise lakes.

One lake, Argentino, is fed by three vast ice tongues (Upsala, Onelli and Perito Moreno), which regularly calve thunderously into the milky waters. Los Glaciares also protects a swathe of pristine Patagonian steppe, Magellanic forests and southern beech (fiery in autumn), as well as puma, condor and ostrich-like *choique*.

The alpine village of El Chaltén is a good hub for trekkers; from here you can hike round Mount Fitz Roy. Alternatively, for the drama of Perito Moreno, catch a bus from El Calafate then stroll between the viewpoints on the Península de Magallanes, take a boat trip up to the glacier's 60m-high face, or hire a guide and crampons to walk on top.

SEE THE SITE: Flights from Buenos Aires to El Calafate, the main gateway to the park, take around 3.5 hours.

LIKE THIS? TRY... Ischigualasto/Talampaya NPs, Argentina – this desert on the border of the Sierras Pampeanas is a realm of rugged rock imbedded with tonnes of Triassic fossils. ►

3

Iguazu/Iguaçu National Park

ARGENTINA/BRAZIL

“One of the most spectacular waterfalls in the world”

Iguazu's so good they inscribed it twice – the Argentine side of this gigantic, jungle-shrouded waterfall became a UNESCO site in 1984, the Brazilian side in 1986. In short, it's a natural World Heritage wonder whichever angle you're coming from, a comely collection of between 160 and 270 cascades (depending on the water volume) tumbling into a border-straddling gorge.

But while the 3km-wide falls are the most obvious attraction here – and visitable in various ways, including upper trails, lower trails, get-you-wet boardwalks and boat trips – the surrounding parks are a less-expected revelation. The spray ensures everything around Iguazu Falls is well watered, leading to a profusion of green. This is a realm of subtropical forest, thick with Brazilian pine, wild palms, imbuia, tree ferns, lianas and epiphytes.

A wealth of wildlife hides within, too. Take a walk in the jungle and you'll be besieged by butterflies; also look out for howler monkeys and myriad birds. Species such as giant anteater, giant otter and jaguar are present but harder to spot. The cheeky, fearless raccoon-like coatis, however, are impossible to miss: feed them at your peril.

SEE THE SITE: There are airports at Foz do Iguaçu (Brazil) and Puerto Iguazu (Argentina). Regular buses run to the falls from both hubs.

LIKE THIS? TRY... Los Katíos National Park, Colombia – a sweep of hilly, forested biodiversity in the country's north-west, home to many endangered species and endemic plants.

4

City of Potosí

CENTRAL HIGHLANDS, BOLIVIA

“The example par excellence of a major silver mine”

Potosí, which sits breathless on the barren plains at an altitude of around 4,000m, is a place of mixed fortunes. In the 16th century, when silver ore was discovered here, it became the richest city in the Americas. But when the supply dried up in the 19th century, Potosí went into decline.

So it is with its World Heritage status. The city was inscribed in 1987 for being a matchless example of colonial industrialism and architecture. However, in 2014 Potosí was placed on UNESCO’s ‘In Danger’ list: the continuance of mining is destabilising Cerro Rico – the ‘rich mountain’ from which all the silver was sourced – and threatening the authenticity of the site.

Potosí is still worth visiting, though. It has more than 20 churches and over 2,000 historic buildings, some with red-tiled roofs and graceful porticos, some in pretty pastels, others with intricate iron balconies. Pick of the bunch is the Casa Real de la Moneda, the former royal mint, now an excellent museum. It’s also possible to take guided tours down the active mines, squeezing through narrow shafts and witnessing the appalling working conditions – a powerful experience, but potentially dangerous and (some may feel) unpleasantly voyeuristic.

SEE THE SITE: Buses run to Potosí from cities such as Uyuni (3hrs), Sucre (3hrs) and La Paz (8.5hrs).

LIKE THIS? TRY... Historic Town of Ouro Preto, Brazil – the focus of Brazil’s gold rush, which retains graceful flourishes of 18th-century Brazilian Baroque. ►

Dreamstime/Alamy



5

Tiwanaku

ALTIPLANO, BOLIVIA

“Monumental remains testifying to the significance of this civilisation”

Forget the Inca for a minute. The Tiwanaku culture, which at its peak (AD 500-900) numbered 50,000 people, is the real cradle of Andean civilisation. Its centre was the namesake city of Tiwanaku, perched close to the southern shores of Lake Titicaca at a lung-squeezing altitude of 3,850m. The city once covered several square kilometres, though only a small part has been excavated.

What has been unearthed is the ceremonial centre of Tiwanaku, a complex of ruined pyramids, temples, palaces and megaliths set amid the barren highlands. Most striking is the seven-tiered Pyramid of Akapana, believed to be the religious heart of Tiwanaku – local Aymara people still come here to leave offerings to the *achachilas* (mountain gods). Nearby, the Kalasasaya Temple is thought to have been an observatory; inside is the huge Gate of the Sun, carved with a bas-relief of the Tiwanaku deities.

To get a good overview of the complex and culture, start at the on-site museum, which displays items – pots, idols and fragments of elaborate textiles – that nod to its skills.

SEE THE SITE: Tiwanaku is 70km west of La Paz. Buses from the capital will drop passengers off at the entrance to the ruins on request.

LIKE THIS? TRY... Chavín, Peru – imposing site in a high valley of the Peruvian Andes, once a ceremonial centre for the Chavín, who worshipped here between 1500 and 300 BC.

Amy Dreamstime



6

Brasília

FEDERAL DISTRICT, BRAZIL

“A landmark in town planning”

Brasília is a World Heritage youngster. The pre-planned Brazilian capital only came into being in 1956, and was inscribed onto the list just 31 years later. This is thanks to the imagination and innovation of urban planner Lucio Costa and architect Oscar Niemeyer, who dreamed up a city of harmonious Modernist design. The vibe is retro-space age, laid out in an airplane-like shape, with futuristic skyscrapers and government buildings on one axis and the residential areas on the other, linked by excellent roads.

Visit the cathedral, which rears up like a splayed crown of thorns; catch a performance or exhibition at the Teatro Nacional, an Aztec-like pyramid of glass; and head to the blocky, grey-black Central Bank building, where the Museum of Money showcases financial history and an enormous nugget of gold.

SEE THE SITE: Long-distance buses connect Brasília to cities across the country. Alternatively, fly in to the city's Presidente Juscelino Kubitschek airport – the best views of the city are from the air.

LIKE THIS? TRY... Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas, Venezuela – finished in 1960, the campus is a classic example of Modern Movement architecture. ►





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7

Serra da Capivara National Park

PIAUÍ STATE, BRAZIL

“A testimony to one of South America’s oldest human communities”

This national park in Brazil’s north-east contains a semi-arid land of mountains, plains, valleys, rock formations and Brazilian *caatinga* (‘white forest’) – a shimmering swathe of scrub, cacti and deciduous woodland. It’s interesting enough in its own right, but the presence of the oldest rock art in the Americas adds an extra tingle.

Some of the 300-odd cave paintings and sites discovered here could date back 30,000-50,000 years. If correct, this contradicts widely held notions of how and when South America was first colonised. The artworks depict a range of scenes, from hunting and dancing to fighting and sex; other pictographs represent animals (jaguar, tapir, rhea) and supernatural beings.

The sites are spread out, so join a tour with an archaeologist guide to help make sense of the magnificent, world-changing markings.

SEE THE SITE: The main gateway town is São Raimundo Nonato. The nearest airports are Theresina (500km) and Petrolina (300km).

LIKE THIS? TRY... Cueva de las Manos, Río Pinturas, Argentina – the palm print rock art of Patagonia’s Cave of Hands was created between 9,500 and 13,000 years ago.

8

Discovery Coast Atlantic Forest Reserves

BAHIA AND ESPÍRITO SANTO STATES, BRAZIL

“The world’s richest rainforests in terms of biodiversity”

Named for the site of the first Portuguese landing, by Pedro Cabral in 1500, the listed area covers eight protected zones, together comprising one of the best remaining sweeps of this ecosystem; rich, tropical broadleaf forest fuzzes the ocean-side limestone plateau. Indeed, nowhere on the planet has more tree species per hectare, including pernambuco (the country’s national tree), piaçaba palms, jatoba and jussara as well as areas of *restingas* (moist coastal forest).

A good base is the lively coastal town of Porto Seguro, from where you can make forays into Monte Pascoal National Park and Pau-Brasil National Park – both part of the UNESCO site. In the former, you can climb the namesake mountain (536m), mountain bike towards the sea and visit the Pataxó Indian settlement.

SEE THE SITE: Flights from Rio, Salvador and other cities land at Porto Seguro airport. The park is south of Porto Seguro, 16km from Itamaraju.

LIKE THIS? TRY... Central Amazon Conservation Complex, Brazil – over 60,000 sq km of rainforest, lakes, tributaries, channels and trees supporting an untold abundance of wildlife.

9

Historic Centre of Salvador de Bahia

BAHIA STATE, BRAZIL

“One of the major points of convergence of European, African and American Indian cultures”

Brazil isn’t short on colonial-era cities with UNESCO listings but Salvador, nestled on a hilly peninsula overlooking Todos os Santos Bay, arguably has something extra. It was the first capital of Brazil (1549-1763), had the dubious honour of hosting the New World’s first slave market, and is awash with architectural reminders of the past – from the wide plazas to the baroque basilica to tumbledown streets lined with pastel-hued and stuccoed Renaissance houses.

But it’s the multicultural vibe that you notice most: Salvador is the epicentre of African Brazil, and alleys here buzz with *candomblé* rituals and beating drums. Browse the lanes of the steep, cobbled Pelourinho, tuck into *acarajé* (deep-fried balls of mashed black-eyed peas with shrimp paste) and watch *capoeira* moves being cut on the beach.

SEE THE SITE: Flights connect Salvador to Rio (2hrs) and other Brazilian cities.

LIKE THIS? TRY... Historical Centre of the City of Arequipa, Peru – a cluster of native and European architecture, from chapels and convents to *casas*, the city’s typical courtyard houses. ►

EXPLORE OFFBEAT SOUTH AMERICA

Escape the crowds at South America's most famous sites and discover some of the region's lesser-known marvels. Here, Audley specialists share their top picks to help you find authentic, original experiences.



TREK TO LITTLE-KNOWN CHOQUEQUIRAO, PERU by Fiona Cameron

The vast and remote Inca site of Choquequirao rivals Machu Picchu in its scale and grandeur, but still only attracts a fraction of the visitors due to its challenging location in the remote mountains of southern Peru. Currently only accessed by a five day trek, the walking route takes a dramatic descent down to the Apurimac River canyon where condors soar overhead, before climbing to a vast plateau on which the ruins sit.



ENJOY FINE WINE IN CAFAYATE, ARGENTINA by Sunny Gill

Though Mendoza is Argentina's best-known wine tasting destination, the foothills of the Andes near the northwestern town of Cafayate provide fantastic conditions for wine production, but with some superb and lesser-visited attractions within easy reach. The looming red mountains of the nearby Calchaquí Valley are simply breathtaking, and day trips to the ruins at Quilmes are also possible from Cafayate.



DISCOVER REMARKABLE MARBLE CAVES, CHILE by Richard Wise

Chile's marble caves are one of the country's best-kept secrets. Five hours south of Coyhaique in the Aisén region, the drive is largely on a single-track dirt road to reach South America's second largest lake, Lago General Carrera. Many of our favourite local lodges offer excursions here, including kayaking into the depths of the caves. Visually, they seem to melt into the ice-clear water of the lake, and the photographer in you will want to shoot every bend and corner.



EXPERIENCE CITY LIFE IN MEDELLÍN, COLOMBIA by Holly Kennedy

The most forward-looking city in Colombia has now escaped its Escobar-dominated past with its cosmopolitan vibe and wealth of cultural attractions. Located in the Aburrá Valley, the city boasts a superb cable car transport system, Colombia's most famous living artist - Fernando Botero - as well as hosting the renowned Medellín Flower Festival every August. Just outside the city you'll find the charming, brightly-decorated town of Guatapé alongside the giant monolith of El Peñol - worth a climb for the spectacular views.

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10

Rapa Nui National Park

RAPA NUI/EASTER ISLAND,
CHILE**“An unrivalled cultural landscape”**

Adrift in the Pacific Ocean, Easter Island is one of the remotest places on the planet – and one of the most mysterious. We think that this small chunk of volcanic rock was first colonised by Eastern Polynesians from around AD 700. But quite why they decided to sculpt huge lumps of tuff, scoria and basalt into strange big heads (known as *moai*), then haul them from the Rano Raraku crater and erect them all over the island remains a puzzle.

There are around 900 statues in all, ranging from two to 20m tall; some are complete, with obsidian eyes, others have been left semi-carved. There are also 300 ceremonial platforms and the remains of other domestic structures. Must-sees include the 15 moai of Ahu Tongariki and the beachside sculptures at Anakena. Also, take a walk around Rano Raraku, to explore the Rapa Nui's alfresco workshop.

SEE THE SITE: Easter Island is a six-hour flight from Santiago.

LIKE THIS? TRY... Brazilian Atlantic Islands: Atol das Rocas and Fernando de Noronha Reserves – home to profuse wildlife, including sharks, turtles and the largest concentration of tropical seabirds in the Western Atlantic.

11

Port of Cartagena

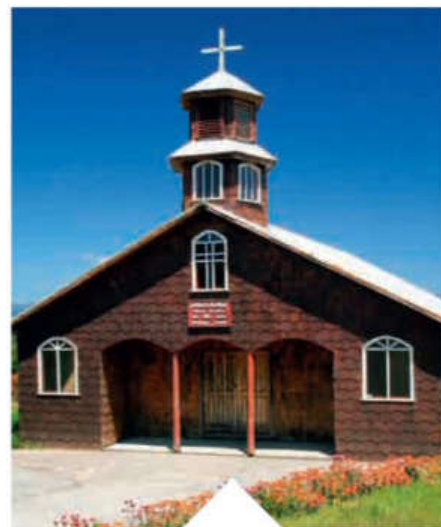
CARIBBEAN COAST,
COLOMBIA**“The most extensive fortifications in South America”**

Pastel-painted, palace-dotted, wall-wrapped, Caribbean-lapped Cartagena is a dreamy Latin vision made real. UNESCO says, quite perfunctorily, that within the colonial heart of the city ‘can be found civil, religious and residential monuments of beauty and consequence’ but that seems to be missing part of the point. Yes, Cartagena has a matchless complex of military walls, fortresses and a bastioned harbour, but it is the fairytale feel and sensual vibe that makes the city so intoxicating.

Soak this atmosphere up on a wander amid the old districts of El Centro and San Diego, where church spires soar, colourful streets squiggle, plazas are shaded by rippling palms and windowboxes drip with bougainvillea. Also, take a walk along *las murallas* (those old 16th-century walls) to gaze down on the city and the sea beyond.

SEE THE SITE: Cartagena is a 1hr 30min flight from Bogotá.

LIKE THIS? TRY... Historic City of Sucre, Bolivia – the first capital of Bolivia, founded in 1538, retains a classic checkerboard layout and fine examples of 16th-century architecture.



12

Churches of Chiloé

CHILOÉ ARCHIPELAGO,
CHILE**“A successful fusion of indigenous and European culture”**

Speckling the Pacific, just south of the Chilean Lake District, the Chiloé Archipelago stretches around 190km north-south, the surface-probing extremities of a sunken mountain range. These islands were once the preserve of the native Chonos and Huilliche peoples, who fished and farmed here; however, in 1567 the Spanish arrived. They were followed in 1608 by Jesuit missionaries and, in the 18th and 19th centuries, by the Franciscans, all keen to convert the locals. In order to do this, the new arrivals built a circuit of churches, which they could stay at for a few days as they travelled round, evangelising.

Today there are 60 mission churches on the archipelago, 14 of which are considered particularly impressive, for their exquisite wooden construction, their colourful interiors and their fusion of European and indigenous traditions. Plan your own loop of Chiloé to take some of them in – perhaps the graceful cypress-and-larch church of Nercón, bright-blue Tenaún, 53m-long Quinchao (the biggest) or Neo Gothic Castro.

SEE THE SITE: Flights connect Santiago and Puerto Montt (1hr 40mins). Buses run from the airport to Ancud and Castro on Chiloé, via the Chacao Channel ferry.

LIKE THIS? TRY... Jesuit Missions of the Chiquitos, Bolivia – a collection of six *reducciones* (settlements of Christianised Indians) founded by the Jesuits in the 17th and 18th centuries. ►



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15

Sangay National Park

CENTRAL ANDES,
ECUADOR**“Illustrates the entire spectrum of ecosystems, ranging from tropical rainforests to glaciers”**

Sangay has been redeemed. This park, which gathers together three 5,000m-plus volcanoes (two of them active) plus valleys, rainforests and a sprinkle of waterfalls, was placed on the ‘In Danger’ list in 1992, when illegal poaching and construction threatened its integrity. However, by 2005, it was considered fully UNESCO-worthy once more. It’s the range of terrain here that’s so impressive – running the gamut from snow-capped mountain tops and high-altitude páramo to the lush lowlands of the Amazon Basin. Plus, its remoteness means wildlife thrives here: tapir and puma, giant otter and spectacled bear, Andean condor and cock-of-the-rock.

The park can be explored via hiking trails, by bike or on horseback. Technical climbers might fancy El Altar (5,139m), the inactive member of the park’s volcanic trio. Tungurahua (5,016m) is currently too volatile to ascend. Sangay (5,230m) still spits and huffs, but – conditions dependent – can be conquered on a five-day trek.

SEE THE SITE: The popular way to enter Sangay is via the northern entrance, 70km from Baños. Baños is a four-hour bus ride south of Quito.

LIKE THIS? TRY... Huascarán National Park, Peru – a stunner of a park in the Cordillera Blanca, focused around 6,768m Mount Huascarán, with glacial lakes, plunging ravines and a range of Andean wildlife. ►



13

San Agustín
Archaeological Park

HUILA, COLOMBIA

“The largest group of megalithic sculptures in South America, in a wild, spectacular landscape”

For a long time, the FCO cautioned against visiting this ancient treasure in southern Colombia; it still does advise against all but essential travel in the regions nearby. Which is a pity, because San Agustín is quite unique, an archaeological wonderland created by a little-known culture that thrived from around AD 0-800.

The handiwork of these ancient peoples is scattered across a wide area in the eastern Andean foothills. There are funerary monuments, burial mounds, stone statuary (in the forms of humans, animals and birds) and even carvings in the rocky bed of a stream. A museum explains some background, then you can hike or horse-ride around the site to get a feel for the scale of the civilisation’s achievements.

SEE THE SITE: The Archaeological Park is 2.5km west of the town of San Agustín. The nearest airports are in Neiva (4hrs drive away) and Popayán (8hrs).

LIKE THIS? TRY... National Archeological Park of Tierradentro, Colombia – underground tombs and huge human statues dating from AD 500 to 1000, nestled in the northern Andes.

14

Galápagos Islands

PACIFIC OCEAN, ECUADOR

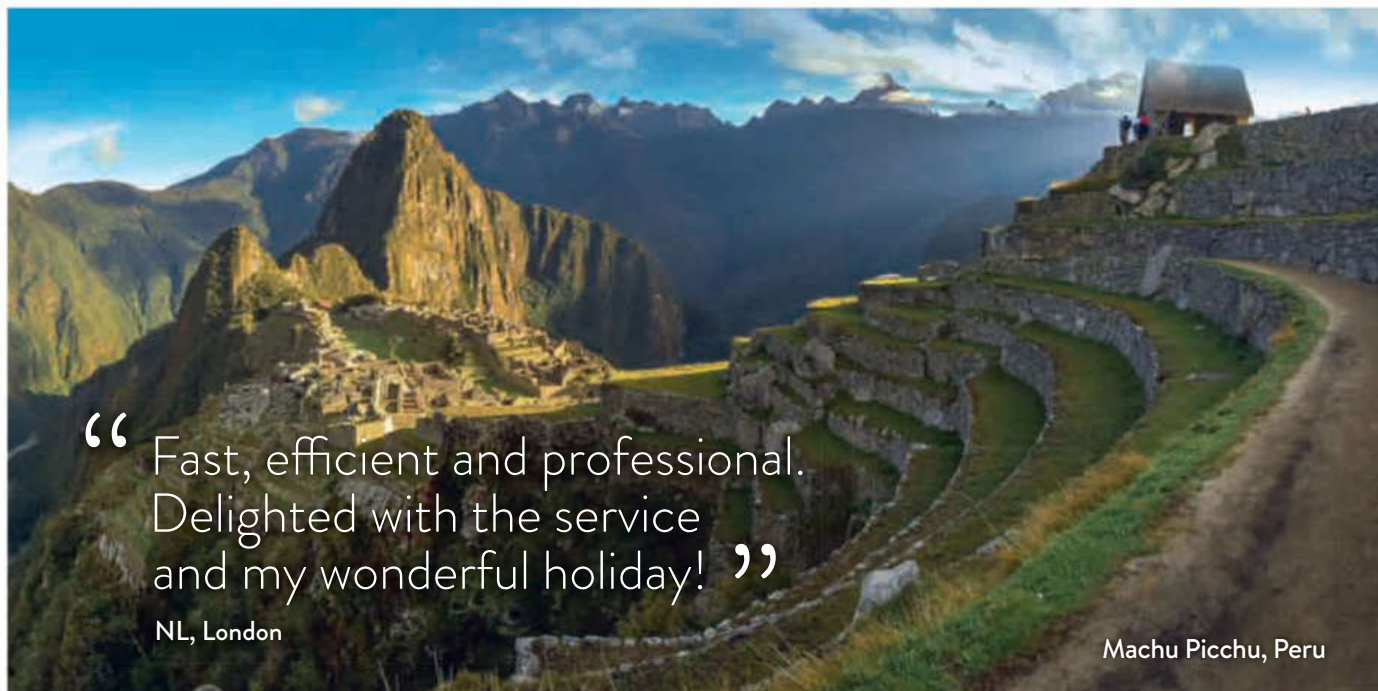
“A unique living museum and showcase of evolution”

The Galápagos might be the Latin American UNESCO site that’s loved just a bit too much. The magical, yet fragile, archipelago struggles under the weight of people wanting to visit, as well as migration, overfishing and invasive species. However, despite all of the problems, it remains one of the world’s very best wildlife destinations – there are few other places where the creatures are so unafraid and so brilliantly weird, or that have inspired an entire rethink of evolution.

Cruising around the islands will introduce you to its numerous residents – the playful sea lions, the piles of pitch-black marine iguanas, the lumbering giant tortoises, the many types of booby. Boats with kayaks and snorkel gear will allow different levels of interaction. Just tread carefully as you go.

SEE THE SITE: The Galápagos has two airports (on Baltra and San Cristóbal). Flights from Quito take 2hrs 15mins.

LIKE THIS? TRY... Malpelo Fauna and Flora Sanctuary, Colombia – a no-fishing marine park, 500km off Colombia’s Pacific coast, that provides a vital habitat for threatened species, especially sharks.



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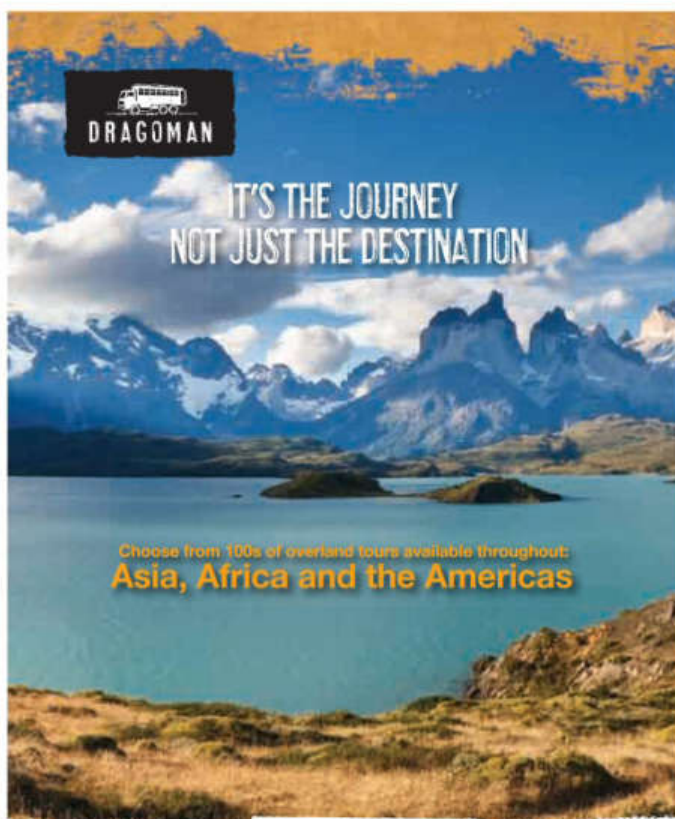
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16

Quito

NORTHERN ECUADOR

“The best-preserved, least-altered historic centre in Latin America”

When UNESCO designated its first 12 World Heritage sites in 1978, the historic centre of the Ecuadorian capital was one of them. Even the powerful earthquake of 1917 couldn't rattle this Latin lovely: the architecture here remains intact and wonderfully harmonious, a masterclass in the style that became known as the Baroque school of Quito. This design ethos originated in the 17th and 18th centuries, combining Spanish, Italian, Moorish, Flemish and indigenous styles to create something spectacular.

Amid the Old Town, laid out neatly in a series of squares, are some real gems: the monastery of Santo Domingo, with its exquisite works of art, and the La Compañía church, with its glittering interior of gilded walls, altars and plasterwork. Take a walking tour around the Old Town or ride the teleférico sky tram up Pichincha volcano for the finest city overview.

SEE THE SITE: Quito's international airport is 18km east of the centre.

LIKE THIS? TRY... Historic Centre of Lima, Peru – known as the Ciudad de los Reyes (City of Kings), Lima is another capital with an impressive old town, full of colonial architecture.

17

Jesuit Missions of La Santísima Trinidad de Paraná & Jesús de Tavarangue

PARANÁ RIVER AREA, PARAGUAY

“Evidence of a unique urban scheme”

Paraguay's only UNESCO site – like a fair few other Latin inscriptions – owes its existence to those proselytising Jesuits. The Christian crew arrived in the Río de la Plata Basin area in 1588, encouraging locals to adopt the religion but not enforcing a full Europeanisation; consequently, many indigenous traditions remain.

La Santísima Trinidad de Paraná (built in 1706, and the better preserved) and Jesús de Tavarangue (1760), both now in ruins, are 10km apart, and follow a similar design: a central church flanked by the home of the Fathers, with the chiefs' residence nearby, plus workshops, a yard and cemetery; the indigenous people's homes were along streets radiating from a large square. **SEE THE SITE:** The entrance to the missions is 31km from the southern city of Encarnación (itself a 3.5hr bus ride from capital Asunción).

LIKE THIS? TRY... Jesuit Missions of the Guaranis – a multi-country site, encompassing five missions across Argentina and Brazil, built amid tropical forest during the 17th and 18th centuries.

18

Historic Sanctuary of Machu Picchu

ANDES, PERU

“The most amazing urban creation of the Inca Empire at its height”

There were rumours the (over) popular lost Inca citadel might be declared 'In Danger' when the UNESCO Committee gathered in July 2015, with a final decision postponed until 2017. Certainly the site is a victim of its own popularity. Well, it's a hidden ruin that out-foxed the Spanish, tucked deep in lush, misty mountains, tumbling delightfully down an improbable slope, and accessible only via a splendid old paved pathway or a scenic train – what's not to love? It has all the romance you could want from a travel destination – but sadly all the people you don't.

Relieve a bit of the burden on the site by hiking one of the alternative trails to Machu Picchu – perhaps via the Salcantay route, Lares Valley or Choquequirao – and by visiting some of Peru's lesser known archaeological gems.

SEE THE SITE: Flights from Lima to Cuzco take 70 minutes. The train to Aguas Calientes (for Machu Picchu) leaves from nearby Poroy.

LIKE THIS? TRY... Chan Chan Archaeological Zone, Peru – this vast, earthen city, the capital of the Chimú Kingdom, is already on UNESCO's 'In Danger' list. ►





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19

Manú National Park

AMAZON, PERU

“Home to an unrivalled variety of animal and plant species”

Manú is massive. This park in the Peruvian Amazon covers some 15,000 sq km of tropical forest, snaking rivers, alluvial plains and Andean foothills. The biodiversity here is off the scale; for example, around 850 bird species have been recorded, though who knows how many more species might lurk here. Creatures we do know about include jaguar, giant otter, giant armadillo, black caiman, various monkeys and myriad macaws.

Tourism is only allowed in three areas of the park: the Acjanaco Sector/Tres Cruces, a high-altitude region of puña grasslands and cloudforest, home to puma and Andean bear; the Cultural History Zone, in the Palotoa River Basin, home to the Pusharo petroglyphs; and the Manú River Sector, where boat trips and stays at jungle lodges offer an introduction to both the prolific wildlife and the native culture.

SEE THE SITE: Manú can be accessed from Cuzco and Puerto Maldonado, which have airports. From both cities, it is a journey by land and boat to access the park.

LIKE THIS? TRY... Pantanal Conservation Area, Brazil – this enormous south-west wetland is a wonderful place to see a huge range of wildlife that’s often trickier to spot in the Amazon.

20

Fray Bentos Industrial Landscape

FRAY BENTOS, URUGUAY

“An illustration of the entire process of meat production on a global scale”

Er, yes, meat production heritage! Who knew it was so important? In answer: not as many people as know it now. The factories here, on the banks of the Uruguay River, represent South America’s newest UNESCO site, freshly designated in July 2015. It’s a huge complex, founded close to the livestock-rich prairies in 1859, and showcasing the whole method of meat manufacturing – from sourcing and processing to packing and dispatching.

The old El Anglo plant, which closed in 1979, is now a heritage museum, an eerily empty disarray of people-less warehouses, unhinged gates, rusty hooks and collapsed cattle corrals. As for the rest of Fray Bentos, there are some leafy plazas and some colourful houses, and the sandy beaches of Las Cañas are 8km away.

SEE THE SITE: Fray Bentos is a four-hour bus ride from capital Montevideo. A bridge over the river links the city to Argentina.

LIKE THIS? TRY... Coffee Cultural Landscape of Colombia – the lush, leafy, sustainable (and world sustaining) java-producing slopes of the Andean foothills, dotted with traditional villages.

21

Canaima National Park

VENEZUELA

“A unique biogeological entity, with sheer cliffs and waterfalls, including the world’s highest”

Canaima, in south-east Venezuela, hard up against the Brazil and Guyana borders, feels positively prehistoric. Around 65% of the park is covered by *tepui* – majestic, jungly flat-topped inselbergs that have evolved in splendid isolation, from both the outside world and each other. This means the area is a hotbed of endemism, with each tepui summit having its own unique ecosystem; the most explored is Mt Roraima, which can be climbed on a steep and sweaty five-day expedition from the village of Paratepui.

The park is also a-splish with waterfalls, not least Angel, the world’s highest, which tumbles 1,002m down the side of Auyantepui. There’s also rarities such as giant anteater, giant armadillo and little spotted cat, to the native Pemón people, who have roamed amid Canaima’s forests and savannah for at least 10,000 years.

SEE THE SITE: Daily flights via Puerto Ordaz connect Canaima airstrip with major cities in Venezuela.

LIKE THIS? TRY... Noel Kempff Mercado NP, Bolivia – a huge tract of intact Amazon Basin habitats, home to an estimated 4,000 species of flora and 600-plus species of birds. 🦋

Competition

WIN A Lowe Alpine Voyager Travel Backpack

No matter where your next big adventure takes you, **Lowe Alpine's** new Voyager Adventure Travel Backpack has all the features to ensure your travels go smoothly

Whether you're tackling the wild rainforests of South-East Asia or overlanding in Patagonia, good luggage is a vital sidekick. Drawing on nearly 50 years of creating outdoor equipment, **Lowe Alpine** has designed its new adventure travel range so it can withstand the rigours of long-haul travel. With that self-drive trip or trekking trail beckoning, you're going to need luggage that's up to the job and Lowe Alpine's Voyager Travel Backpack is the answer.

The frame-length zip means you can easily and quickly pack everything into the holdall's 70 litres of space – perfect if you have a busy itinerary. It also doubles up as a backpack, with straps and a harness to make it easily carried, which can be neatly folded away so it's not caught on the airport carousel.

Weight watchers

At 2.28kg the bag doesn't take up much of your weight allowance and with an internal compression system to secure your belongings you'll find the weight equally spread throughout, to make it easier to carry. It's built with travel in mind too – its durable fabric has no problem dealing with

the rough and tumble of being hauled from plane to hotel or squashed on local transport.

A detachable 15-litre day pack also comes as part of the package too, which you can use as hand luggage for the plane and for day trips while you're pitstopping around the globe.

Pocket guides

Keeping the important stuff safe isn't an issue either: tamperproof zips will help ward off pickpockets and a secret pocket allows you to stash your cash and documents. Another handy pocket can store your tablet, meaning you won't have to leave your gadgets behind.

Global travel is thirsty work: nifty pockets on both the holdall and day sack can store your water bottles. Lash points dotted around the outside of the holdall mean you can clip on your hiking poles or a camera tripod. If you're out in the rain, you can even use a lash point to store your dripping coat away from rest of your belongings – a protective raincover can also be zipped out of the bottom of the holdall too and fits snugly over both bags, keeping everything dry.

The Voyager Backpack is your best option for travelling and can adapt to any situation you may come across on your adventure, making it the perfect companion to take with you, wherever you're going...



HOW TO WIN

Lowe Alpine is giving away five Voyager 70+30L Travel Backpacks (RRP £140) and you could be in with the chance of winning one of them. They come in both male and female models and in two different colours. To enter the competition, simply answer the following:

Q: What year was Lowe Alpine founded?

a) 1967 b) 1986 c) 1921


To enter and for full terms & conditions, go to www.wanderlust.co.uk/competitions. Send your answer to the Wanderlust office (address p2). The closing date is 21st October 2015. State 'no offers' if you'd rather not be contacted by Wanderlust or sponsors.



For further information, visit www.lowealpine.com

TRAVEL MASTERCLASS

Become an instant expert
with our travel know-how



Find out
where
cats are
making a
comeback
see p64

■ **This month's experts include:** Planet pedaller Charlie Walker p63 ♦ Peru guru Ben Box, p66 ♦ Adventure ace Ben Southall, p66 ♦ Camera king David Yarrow, p68 ♦ Top doc Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth, p70 ♦ Pole-star Phoebe Smith, p73 ♦

"That tree looks bent"
A great way to beat the blues? Start planning your next trip



■ The *Wanderlust* Masterclass

Beat the post-travel blues

We all dream of going on the perfect trip – a trip that stays with us long after the plane has landed back home. But sometimes the best adventures can leave us feeling empty and lost when we return to the daily grind.

Post-travel blues get to all of us at some stage. So how can we ensure we take all the positives from our journeys without feeling down? Here, we look at how reflecting on a past trip can help illuminate our next journeys.

What is it?

Quite simply, post-travel blues is the form of depression that some travellers can experience once they return from a trip. This can range from being disappointed that you're not sitting atop Table Mountain anymore to becoming seriously confused, frustrated and miserable that your home life pales in comparison to the freedom you experienced on your adventures.

"I call it a vacation hangover," says Karen Schaler, host of Canadian series *Travel Therapy TV*. "You come back from a great trip and then you are depressed because it's now back to reality."

Why do we experience it?

In a nutshell, we get the blues because we start comparing our life at home to the trip we've just come back from. The spontaneity we revel in while travelling and the liberty of having no fixed plan is part of what makes the experience so enjoyable. Back home, the usual rituals of regular life can appear almost mind-numbing at first.

You find yourself comparing details – the culture, the society, the people – even if it's subconsciously; more often than not these contrasts can enhance your anxieties.

"Travelling naturally causes you to re-evaluate your own life and environment,

'The best antidote to the post-travel blues – and something *Wanderlust* heartily recommends – is to start planning your next trip'

which can bring dissatisfactions to the surface," explains Dr Alice Boyes, author of *The Anxiety Toolkit*.

For those people who do experience this, there are ways to maximise the positives of a trip to stop that feeling from setting in.

Infuse everyday life with a sense of adventure

One way to navigate the perceived gap between your thrilling adventures and your everyday life is to try to incorporate the best bits of your trip into your life back home. For example, if you're a bit of a foodie, relive some of your trip's best meals by cooking them, visiting ethnic supermarkets to pick up the ingredients. Play the music of the country you miss or delve deeper into its history by visiting any museums with displays or exhibitions on its culture.

Travel psychologist Michael Brein says merging experiences from our travels with our regular lives should start to happen naturally: "Once we begin to appreciate what made us happiest on our travels, we should soon begin to carry that over at home. We see the sights and museums overseas, and after travelling we start to realise we can still explore that country at home."

If you're still craving more of that country, why not organise a themed party for you and your friends? How about an Italian pizza and opera night or a feather-filled Brazilian Carnival parade in your living room.

Embrace your own backyard

Being back home doesn't have to mean settling into the same old routine. Have a look around: there might be a secret wilderness you've never unearthed, a prime landmark you've never properly visited, a wealth of fascinating local history you can delve into. You can have a great travel experience on your doorstep.

"Even if it's just a quick day trip somewhere to try a new restaurant, knowing you have another adventure looming, no matter how small, will keep you inspired," adds Karen.

It's not just *what* you can see on your return that matters, but also *who* you can see. "I make sure I see one of my friends the day I get home, even if it's just for a cup of coffee," explains travel blogger Robert Schrader. "Reminding yourself of the treasures of being home is one of the easiest ways to manifest thankfulness."

Remember the good times

While it's not necessarily good to dwell on a trip for too long, that's not to say you shouldn't remember it. Keeping a diary throughout your adventure is a simple but effective way of reminiscing over the good times – add some of your best photos to it as well.

"Some people make a scrapbook, or blow up photos and hang them on the wall, not only as beautiful reminders for themselves, but as a delightful escape for everyone who comes into the home," says Robert.

Looking at a map of the route you followed, as well as photos you took along the way, will also help you re-engage with that sense of excitement.

Keep on travelling!

Probably the best antidote to the post-travel blues – and something *Wanderlust* heartily recommends – is to start planning your next trip. Get out the guidebooks, pore over the atlas, stick pins in the map – all of these things will help you stay focused on the future rather than stuck in the past. It always helps to have a positive goal to focus on.

"Even if it's months down the road, just the planning will help keep your spirits up because you'll then have something to look forward to," says Karen. Also, the more travel you do, the better you'll become at coping with the coming home.

So, if you find yourself staring longingly at the suitcase in the hall after returning home, get out and explore what's outside your front door – inject some of that adventurous spirit into your immediate environment. And, while you're at it, start jotting down an itinerary for your next big adventure...

Case study

CHARLIE WALKER

The globetrotting cyclist shares his post-travel blues tips



When did you first experience 'post-travel blues'?

When I backpacked around West Africa

as a 19 year old. I spent three months drifting aimlessly through lesser-visited areas where everyone chatted and looked after one another despite being strangers. Suddenly I found myself on the London Underground where nobody even caught each other's eyes.

Why do people get post-travel blues?

When travelling, we spend a lot of time outside our comfort zones. This can be exhausting. However, travellers are constantly challenged, seeing and learning new things. The return to familiarity and routine can be jolting as the brain has become acclimatised to a different way of thinking. I've experienced a sense of boredom upon homecoming, as 'normal life' simply doesn't seem exciting enough.

How did you treat your blues?

I make resolutions for life after my return – to read a book each week or develop new skills. Getting home and seeing friends can be so cosy that those aspirations evaporate, so I try to write down my goals while still on the road and then work on them when I get home, with a monthly progress assessment. Also, planning another trip is always a reliable antidote. Looking back can be enjoyable but looking forward is healthier.

Is there anything to avoid?

When I returned from my 4.5-year bike expedition, I rushed into a job that my heart wasn't in. I was desperate for a half-decent income and a semblance of normality. It felt good at first but I soon realised I should have spent more time considering my options. I would have been better served accepting more time on a shoestring and picking up part-time work to allow longer to settle back in and gain my bearings. 📌

See charliewalkerexplore.co.uk





Cat comeback
Seven lions have been reintroduced to Rwanda's Akagera National Park

FACT

Akagera NP's size was sliced in half following the genocide to accommodate refugees, driving out rhinos and lions. It has now been restored to its former glory.

■ Instant Expert

African lions

Why are we talking about lions?

In the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, the last remaining lions in the country were killed – they were poisoned by cattle herders. Now, after a 15-year absence, they are being reintroduced.

In July 2015, seven lions from South Africa were translocated to Rwanda as part of a conservation programme. They are now happily roaming free in Akagera National Park, having been fitted with satellite collars so the park's rangers can track their movements. After the killing of Cecil the lion in Zimbabwe dominated headlines earlier this summer, it's great to report positive news about lions in Africa.

Great stuff. Are the lions there to stay?

That's the plan. The five females and two males were chosen for their future reproductive potential. African Parks, which manages Akagera, has a successful track record too – when it introduced lions into Malawi's Majete Wildlife Reserve in 2012, cubs were born within a year.

What else can I see in Rwanda?

The country is famed for gorilla tracking: Volcanoes NP, part of the Virunga Mountains, is home to ten habituated mountain gorilla groups; there are more gorillas here than anywhere else. The park is also home to other species, such as golden monkeys and spotted hyena.

Back in Akagera, there's more to see than the new lions. The park is also home to elephants, baboons, blue monkeys and rare roan antelope. Look skywards and you may glimpse some of its 500 bird species too, including shoebill and papyrus gonolek, which like the park's wetlands.

Are there plans to reintroduce other species to Rwanda?

Yes. African Parks has plans to bring black rhino back to Akagera from early next year; Rwanda's rhino population was also wiped out following the genocide. This would mean that Rwanda – already home to buffalo, leopards and elephants – would become Africa's latest 'Big Five' destination.

■ 5-step guide to...

GETTING BY IN MANDARIN CHINESE

1 Select key vocabulary
Lessen the task of learning Mandarin by identifying vocab you will really need. For example: basic courtesy, directions, favourite dishes, numbers and key phrases such as 'how much is it?'.

2 Memory prompts
Chinese words are made of one-syllable sounds, such as 'ma', and can be hard to memorise. Get creative and make up your own memory prompts, eg 'ni hao' means 'hello'. It's pronounced 'knee how' – to remember it, think 'how's your knee?'.

3 Learn the four tones
Quite simply, people will find it hard to understand you unless you add the tone to each sound you make. It's not as hard as it seems, and it doesn't matter if you're tone deaf, you just need to go for it. Always copy a native speaker to get your pronunciation right (use a CD or go online).

4 Familiarise yourself with pinyin
Chinese doesn't use an alphabet so pinyin was invented to give a written aid to pronouncing Chinese characters. Many pinyin spellings are easy to work out, like 'ding', but some you need to learn, like 'qi' (pronounced 'chee').

5 Take it easy
Pace your learning. If you over burden yourself, you may feel deterred. Any Mandarin you master will be appreciated in China. And once you start learning, you may find you don't want to stop.

Contributed by Elinor Greenwood, author of *Easy Peasy Chinese* (DK; out now, £9) and *Fun and Easy Chinese* (Noodle Publishing).

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ASK THE EXPERTS

Winter walking the Camino de Santiago; Northern Peru in two weeks; turning travel passion into pounds; grand photos out of grim weather – our experts put you in the know...

THE EXPERTS



ANDY SYMINGTON

Author of the *Footprint guide to the Camino de Santiago*; footprinttravelguides.com



BEN SOUTHALL

Adventure advocate, presenter & former reef caretaker; bestlifeintheworld.com



BEN BOX

Co-author of the *Footprint guide to Peru*; footprinttravelguides.com



JOE CORNISH

Landscape photographer, author of book, *This Land* (Frances Lincoln, £30; joecornishgallery.co.uk)

Q Can I walk the Camino de Santiago in winter?

B Smith, by email

A An increasing number of people choose to walk the Camino in winter, and it's feasible, though not without difficulties. You'll have to plan your daily stops with a little more care, as many *albergues* (pilgrim hostels) do close their doors in the winter. Inexpensive pensión accommodation is available in most towns and villages, but will add to your budget in places where the hostels are shut. It's worth contacting albergues ahead, as some will open to accommodate a small group. The upside is not having to compete for beds. Enough pilgrims walk it that you can find company if you seek it. Places of interest along the Camino, as well as restaurants, are nearly all open.

The weather won't be easy. Expect plenty of drizzle in Galicia, cold (sometimes below-zero), windy but clear days across La Rioja and Castilla, and snowy conditions in the Pyrenees and the Piedadrita Pass. Investing in proper rainproof gear means you won't need to carry so many extra dry clothes.

Andy Symington, author of Camino de Santiago (Footprint, £9)

Q I've been to Peru before (to Machu Picchu and Lake Titicaca) and I'm thinking of returning to visit the north. What would be a good two-week itinerary?

Helen Conner, by email

A Northern Peru has three worthwhile itineraries.

The first starts at Huaraz in the Cordillera Blanca (one-hour flight or eight-hour bus ride from Lima). Here is some of the best high-altitude trekking in Peru and the influential archaeological site at Chavín. From Huaraz take a bus to Trujillo near the coast to see the fine colonial city and the Moche pyramids at Huacas de la Luna and del Sol, El Brujo and the Chimú adobe citadel of Chan Chán. Then chill out on the beach at Huanchaco.

The second route misses Huaraz and combines Trujillo with Chiclayo, four hours north, which is also surrounded by ancient cities of the Moche and other cultures. It is also a significant birdwatching area.

The final option is to fly straight to Chiclayo, see the sites, and continue nine hours into the Andes to Chachapoyas to see the cities of the Cloud People and the 771m Gocta Falls. Then take the adventurous bus journey to colonial Cajamarca before flying back to Lima.

Ben Box, co-author of Peru (Footprint, £16)

Q Any tips on how I turn my passion for travel into my life? How can I earn enough to ditch my 9-to-5?

Jan Barker, by email

A Sharing my adventures with an online audience is one of the ways I help finance my travels. I started with a small blog for friends and family when I drove around Africa as

Capital trek idea

The 20km sq site of Chan Chan dates back to AD 850 and housed around 30,000 people



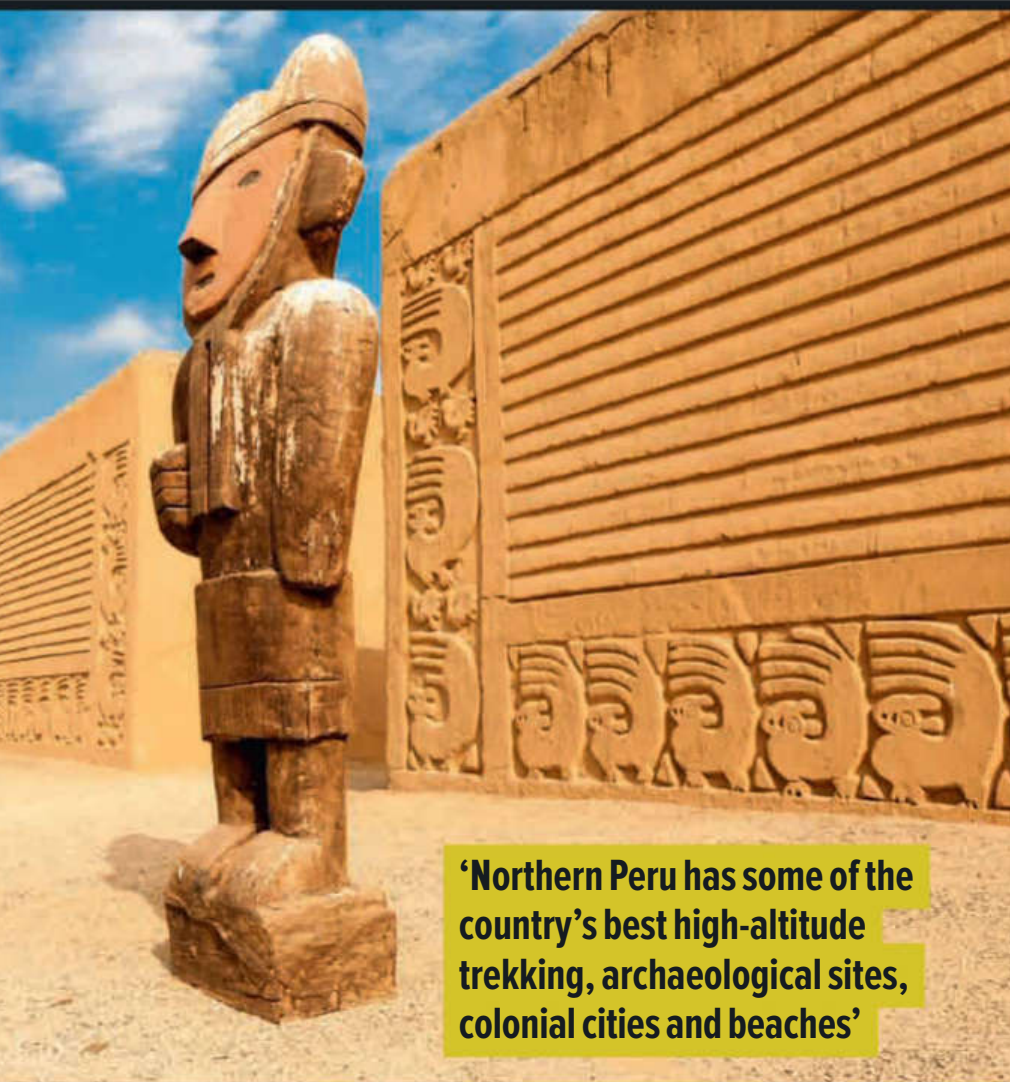
a means of letting them know I was safe and well. Since then I've learnt to share my adventures through social media and now use short web-based movies to build that audience further. Each extra follow, view or like makes you more and more attractive to tourism organisations, sponsors and potential partners who eventually may help you finance your own trip. It's a long haul that's hard work but definitely worth it!

Ben Southall, Adventure advocate & digital journalist

Q I enjoy landscape photography – but how can I take good shots on grim days?

Penny Hale, by email

A There is no such thing as bad weather, only unsuitable clothing – and



‘Northern Peru has some of the country’s best high-altitude trekking, archaeological sites, colonial cities and beaches’

■ **Insiders’ Guide to...**

VIETNAM



Megan Devenish, South East Asia product expert at Exodus Travels (exodus.co.uk), reveals her Vietnam favourites

TO STAY: Seek out one of the homestays located on the tranquil islands of the Mekong Delta for a unique insight into rural Vietnamese life. The activities that you can take part in usually involve cooking with your hosts, exploring the acres of orchards and relaxing in hammocks sheltered by coconut, mango and papaya trees.

TO EAT: *Phở* might be the national dish, but in the nation’s capital, Hanoi, *bun chả* reigns supreme at lunch hour. These small patties of grilled pork and barbequed pork belly are served up in a large bowl of fish sauce-flavoured broth with a good helping of rice noodles and fresh herbs to garnish.

TO RELAX: Halong Bay is one of the most spectacular sites in Vietnam. To make the most of this dramatic landscape ensure you book an overnight cruise so you can star-gaze on deck with a Beer Saigon in hand.

TO EXPLORE: The world’s largest cave, Hang Son Doong, has recently been opened to the public. At more than 200m high, 150m wide and 5km long the cave is so big it has its own river, jungle and climate – as well as some of the planet’s tallest stalagmites – while the end of the cave is still undetermined!



this ancient wisdom holds true for landscape photography. The notion of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ weather is creatively stifling; all it does is lead to fair-weather snappers. Still, the practicalities of shooting in rain, wind or snow are real enough. I always carry a small black travel towel to keep rain/sleet/snow off the camera. If the wind is light an umbrella can be used, although keeping hands free while using it can be a challenge.

Should ‘bad weather’ be emphasised? If it has its own atmosphere and drama, absolutely. And the softer light that comes with cloud and rain is beneficial for texture and detail; wind creates movement in vegetation, which can evoke energy. Landscape painters of the 18th and 19th centuries loved cloud, rain, snow, wind, storm; presumably because it is this turbulent and varied climatic

world that reflects most powerfully on the human condition. And really, that is all you need to know.

Joe Cornish,
landscape photographer

Q I’ve heard about giant hogweed in the UK, which is apparently very painful when touched. Are there other plants I need to watch out for when travelling?

William Ablett, by email

A Yes – lots. Some people are more sensitive than others and may itch on contact with primroses or common rue, the so-called herb-of-grace. Any plants or even seed pods that look spiky or hairy are likely to sting or make you itch. Many plants are armed with fine hairs that take a pair of good, light, fine tweezers and lots of patience to extract.

There are many variants of stinging nettles in the tropics and sub-tropics that pack a punch.

Other plants – including poison oak, poison ivy, sumac and cashew – secrete irritant oils that cause a delayed hypersensitivity reaction; these and others make the skin super-sensitive to sunlight. Most of these plant hazards are avoided by wearing cover-all clothes when pushing through jungly, forested or scrubby environments.

Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth,
Wanderlust health guru

Q What should I do if my luggage doesn’t make it to my destination?

John Steward, by email

A There’s nothing worse than being the last person stood at the carousel when it grinds to halt and your bags

are nowhere to be seen. First things first: don’t despair. Go to the airline desks in the luggage hall and ask for a Property Irregularity Report (PIR) form to fill out.

Airline rules allow a 21-day period before a bag is officially declared lost. Until then it’s technically being ‘traced’ and airlines are supposed to cover the costs of what you have to buy in the mean time. The airline will either provide you with an upfront payment or (more likely) reimburse you once the claim’s been processed.

Take out comprehensive travel insurance that covers you in case of lost luggage and always carry some essential items in your hand luggage to tide you over. A good idea is to split the contents of your luggage with your partner – that way each of you has something to wear if your bags do go AWOL.

The Wanderlust team

TAKE BETTER TRAVEL PHOTOS




Photographer

David Yarrow

explains how to capture that all-important sense of atmosphere

To capture the essence of place, an image should usually have 'contextual narrative'. In other words, it must not be zoomed in too tight around one subject as portraits tend to be.

The characters within the vignette must have room to breathe; this normally means working with a room lens as it's wide enough to take in the whole scene but also capable of capturing a specific moment within that. I think the best art can be looked at for a long time, finding new stories each time you see it, and I do prefer images with a deeper depth of field. This encourages me to close the aperture down a little and work with a slower shutter speed to capture more detail.

For this image, 'Mankind', I wanted to take an image that conveyed the raw enormity of a South Sudanese Dinka cattle camp in an elemental and biblical setting. Something timeless and vast. I was the first photographer to visit this 25,000-strong camp, which was close to the heart of the civil war, and I felt a responsibility to get it right. The smoke gives a sense of place and an ethereal countenance. 'Mankind' is heavenly on one glance and Dante's Hell on the other. 

David Yarrow is a Nikon Ambassador (nikon.co.uk). See davidyarrow.photography

1 Put in the leg work

Don't expect to get a great picture an hour from your front door – those that do have been very lucky. Often you need to sacrifice comfort and go the extra mile, literally. After arriving in South Sudan, I was on the road for 72 hours before I was in a position to take this shot.

2 Research before you go

Research your destination from the comfort of your own home. Examine how other photographers captured it; think about what they got right and wrong. Studying the work of others who'd been to South Sudan, I felt they'd all shot too low – there was no sense of scale to the cattle camps. So I took a ladder (no one at the camp had ever seen a ladder before) and it made all the difference.



3 Know the area

Scout a location in the middle of the day with no camera. It's likely the light will be better in the evening or following morning, so go just to explore and think about what you could do. I took 'Mankind' at 5.40pm, but visited the camp from 10am to noon, and worked out where everything should be 30 minutes before the sun went down.

4 Go against the light

I rarely shoot with the light – it's dull and too literal. If possible shoot with the light at 90° to you. Late evening light is wonderful to work with; it creates moods. Always ask yourself, how can I make this image interesting rather than generic?

5 Ditch the tripod?

I don't understand why some people shoot with a tripod when there's plenty of light. I shot this with a hand-held Nikon and the definition is perfect. Leave the tripod at home. They're cumbersome and, with today's camera bodies, they're rarely needed.

TOP TIP

Buy the best lenses that you can afford. If a seven-day trip costs £1,000, buy a lens that costs half that and will last for years. 'Mankind' was taken with a Nikon 58mm f1.4, a majestic lens.



TRAVEL CLINIC

with Doctor Jane



Packing your troubles?

Travel is often seen as a good way to de-stress –
but can it create more anxiety than it cures?

Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth investigates

Travel experiences are emotionally loaded. There is excitement, yes, but the tingle-factor comes at least in part from the fact that we are stressed, even if only a little. On arriving in a new place, there is a lot to deal with: a bombardment of sights and sounds, unfamiliar signposting, a lack of familiar support systems. You may feel hounded by touts and beggars; people might seem to stand too close. You are probably also fatigued and jetlagged.

It can take hours to accomplish simple tasks, such as finding a hotel or buying a bus ticket. You might resent feelings of homesickness. You may also start to resent local people when they appear obstructive or unhelpful – but then you start hearing phrases such as ‘Peruvian time’, mañana, insh’Allah or ‘that’s life’. It is important to slow down, and to accept that in some places

things just move at a more relaxed pace than you’re used to.

GOOD STRESS, BAD STRESS

The work you have to put into travelling adds spice to exotic experiences. Unpredictability increases the excitement. Indeed, many of us like to feel a little out of control; being on the edge of coping can give a real buzz.

Travel can be seen as an escape from stressors at home – some people organise a big getaway after a break up or bereavement, or even on receipt of a devastating diagnosis. However, it’s important to remember the problems you hoped to leave at home often accompany you on the journey. And the levels of stress you experience on a trip are partly down to the kind of person you are.

TOP TIP: Switch off your phone and find somewhere to chill; perhaps a local spa or simply a chair outside a café

– enjoy having nothing to do but watch the world go by.

PREPARATIONS

Some travellers research their destination carefully and devise a strict itinerary. But even rigid plans may alter if there are strikes, weather events or other complications. Those who like a predictable schedule will find changes stressful; others will embrace this as an opportunity to experience the unexpected.

Those who plan nothing, shun guidebooks and plunge in unprepared are at risk of a different range of hazards. Not checking Foreign & Commonwealth Office advice could mean walking into riots or natural disasters, with consequences ranging from an inability to catch a bus, to invalidating your travel insurance, to much worse. Without knowing local laws, you could be arrested for carrying illegal substances – like pork and alcohol in certain

Squeezing it in
Having unrealistic goals about what you can fit in your trip – and your bag – can lead to disappointment

Muslim countries or even poppy seeds in the UAE. Ignorance of these laws won’t stop you being put in prison – which definitely increases stress levels.

TOP TIP: Check FCO advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) before travel. The US Department of State site (state.gov/travel) also contains lots of useful information on local laws as well as local health facilities and security risks.

HEALTH CHALLENGES

People travelling with long-standing health issues need to





'The key to having a stress-free experience is to avoid goal-driven trips. Expecting to see everything is likely to lead to disappointment'

plan carefully, even on short trips. Do not assume you can arrange routine blood tests anywhere or that medical supplies will be available. Accessing such services in an unfamiliar place (especially a non-English-speaking destination) can be time-consuming and stressful. EHICs smooth the way in much of Europe.

TOP TIP: Carry a medical summary and list of regular

medications with their generic names. Get your GP's approval before booking any remote trips if you have health challenges.

EXPECTATIONS

Expectations influence stress levels. You may be imagining a trip to paradise but if your first impression is pollution and poverty, you might feel huge disappointment, even anger.

Flight fatigue and jetlag limit the ability to cope with delays and surprises, and compromise enjoyment. If time permits, break journeys into shorter legs, which is good for mind and body. Jetlag tends to be worse when travelling east (when you lose time); it takes about a day per hour of time difference to adjust sleep patterns. Bowels take longer to reset.

There aren't any well proven herbal or pharmacological remedies to suppress the symptoms of jetlag but getting out into daylight helps. To speed the resetting of the biological clock take high-protein meals

3 THINGS TO REMEMBER


- ◆ Problems left at home often sneak on board too
- ◆ Travel is tiring, as well as exciting; be patient with yourself and others
- ◆ Check the security situation before departure

early in the day and eat low-protein, carbohydrate-rich foods in the evening. Some travellers believe tyrosine and tryptophan supplements help. Others use homeopathic No-Jet-Lag or preparations based on arnica, but I find rest and dietary manipulation most effective. Melatonin is probably helpful; this is available over the counter in the Americas and online in the UK.

TOP TIP: Carefully consider flight schedules and don't automatically book the cheapest flight – it may be wise to book a more expensive flight that arrives at a better time to minimise jetlag, fatigue and feelings of disorientation.

SCHEDULE

The key to having an enjoyable, stress-free experience is to avoid goal-driven trips. Expecting to see everything a destination offers is likely to lead to disappointment and frustration. You'll get the most out of any visit – and come home more chilled – if you allow time for people-watching. This is also when chance encounters happen – those encounters that sweeten the travel experience and furnish you with good tales to share when you return home.

TOP TIP: Having too many goals increases stress levels. 

Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth's website is at www.wilson-howarth.com



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■ Traveller's Guide To...

WALKING POLES

From aiding stability to saving your knees; from clearing branches to doubling as a make-shift tripod, if heading into the wild make sure you pack a pair...

WEIGHT

Key for any traveller, the lighter the better – but losing grams usually means spending more cash and often means losing features such as easy-to-use clip locks.

LOCKING MECHANISMS

Poles will usually be divided into two or three segments that lock together. The main types you'll encounter are twist locks (they keep weight down but can be difficult to operate with cold or wet hands) or external clip locks (easy to use even when wearing gloves or when wet but tends to add more weight).

ONE OR TWO?

Some poles are sold singularly but most as pairs. One pole is fine if you're walking on flat terrain with a small pack, but for reducing impact on your joints, backpacking and using for stability, you should definitely get two.

SHOCK ABSORBERS

Some poles will have this feature: basically internal springs that absorb the impact when walking downhill. This feature can usually be turned off if not needed. Some people like it, others don't, but they usually add weight.



LENGTH

Most good poles will be length adjustable, offering a height of between 90-130cm. The segments will either be telescopic or foldable – it's worth checking that the folded length will fit inside your luggage before you buy.

HANDLE

Every pole will have a handle, but make sure you try holding them properly (see box). They can be made out of different materials – from cork, to plastic, rubber and foam – but the key thing to look for is cushioning and a moulded grip; make sure there's not too many blister-causing indentations. Foam and cork work better for warm weather.

WOMEN'S SPECIFIC

A lot of poles are unisex but for ladies you may want to consider those specifically designed for women – they are usually shorter (so save space and weight in your luggage) and have smaller handles too.

MATERIAL

Poles are usually made from aluminium/alloy (durable – will bend before they break; is cheaper, but often heavier) and carbon fibre (often much lighter but if they do break they are more likely to splinter; is more expensive).

HOLD POLES PROPERLY

All good poles will come with a leash (look for one that's adjustable and offers some padding/cushioning for comfort). To hold them properly you need to do the following:



1. Put your hand up through the looped leash and then pull it down by gripping the handle.
2. Hold the handle so your fingers line up on the grips and hold the pole loosely.
3. You should adjust the pole length so that your elbow is at a 90 degree bend, keep your elbows in when you walk.

Walking Poles

We test out your essential travel kit, so you don't have to...



VANGO

Deluxe Cork

£28 (also available as singles)

Folded length: 65cm

The test: At £14 per pole and made from alloy metal, these are – unsurprisingly – the heaviest (600g/pair) on test and the longest when folded. However they do boast some nice features. They are the only poles on test to offer shock absorbers (which you can turn on and off with a switch in the handle), they also have a partially padded and adjustable leash and a cork handle covered with neoprene: good for breathability though there are a series of ridges cut within it that have the potential to cause blisters. The locking system is a twist design (which can be a pain in poor weather) and the poles are telescopic for easy packing. They only come in a unisex model, though that's to be expected for the price.

The verdict: Heavier, longer, but cheaper than the rest and for a 'just in case' option this is a good price for the features.

Features: ★★★★★

Length & weight: ★★★★★

Design: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Ease of use: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

www.vango.co.uk



CRAGHOPPERS

Travel Compact

£30 (also available as singles)

Folded length: 55cm

The test: For extra cash you do get a lighter weight (480g/pair; fifth lightest on test) and a shorter folded length. However the price for this is a shorter walking pole – as these only adjust to 98cm max (rather than 135cm – Vango) – not a problem for some, but worth noting. They are made from aluminium, and have an adjustable leash – though no padding, but they do offer both a cork handle (good for breathability but with ridges so blister potential) and a more traditional walking stick style option too, which some might prefer – although this is plastic so less breathable. The lock system is a twist design and it's telescopic for less bulk in your pack. These also only come in a unisex model.

The verdict: A good weight/length make this a budget option for the shorter among us who want a choice of handle types.

Features: ★★★★★

Length & weight: ★★★★★

Design: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Ease of use: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

www.craghoppers.com



KOMPERDELL

C3 Carbon Compact

£100

Folded length: 59cm

The test: If you'd like to go lighter then you need to invest some extra cash. Made from two-parts uber-light carbon and one-part aluminium alloy these weigh in at 410g/pair (third lightest on test) and feel it. They haven't compromised on folded length however – which may be important to some – but by doing so offer a reliable external clip lock and a telescopic design that helps with bulk when packing. The handle is a comfy foam with a slightly longer than average length down the pole, which is good when hiking on uneven terrain. The adjustable leash is lined with a softer material for comfort. There is no women's specific version, though, and you have to buy them as a pair.

The verdict: A good price for lighter poles that, though the packed length isn't so short, still offer solid external clip locks.

Features: ★★★★★

Length & weight: ★★★★★

Design: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Ease of use: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

www.firstascentoutdoordistribution.co.uk



HELINOX

Passport TL130

£130

Folded length: 37cm

The test: Bringing down the weight and the folded length further is Helinox, coming in at just 400g/pair (second lightest on test). Made from ultralight alloy, these are both part-telescopic and part-foldable, courtesy of a combination of a twist and pull and click locking system, making them not only lighter but smaller in your luggage too. Despite cutting grams the handle is still a great length, so good for uneven terrain and made from a comfy foam – though it must be said, this one feels less padded than others on test. The leash is adjustable and partially padded – though again this is not the softest or most comfortable. They are only available in unisex and as a pair.

The verdict: A good length, weight and pack size and good price for a foldable pole, though comfort is compromised.

Features: ★★★★★

Length & weight: ★★★★★

Design: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Ease of use: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

www.helinox.com



How we did the test...

We asked manufacturers to submit walking poles most suited for travellers – being lightweight, packable and durable. From the selection we were sent, our editor, Phoebe Smith, took them out to test the different options for travellers who want maximum utility for minimum luggage bother. The packed length for each and price for a pair is shown. The 'Value Buy' and 'Best in Test' are also indicated.



ANATOM Explorer

£35

Folded length: 65cm

The test: Similar to the offering from Vango the Explorers are made from aluminium, have a longer folded length and heavier weight (530g/pair; third heaviest here). Where they excel is the handle. Made from a comfy foam, with no unwanted ridges, they also stretch down the pole for a good length meaning on undulating ground you can move your hand up and down the handle without needing to adjust the pole's length. The adjustable leash is lined with a soft fabric for comfort. Another plus is the external clip lock system that is easy to use in all weathers. They are telescopic, so have minimal bulk. They are only available in a unisex model and you will have to buy them as a pair.

The verdict: Not the lightest or the smallest when packed, but they offer budget comfort and a reliable clip lock system.

Features: ★★★★★

Length & weight: ★★★★★

Design: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Ease of use: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

www.anatomfootwear.co.uk



TERRA NOVA Trail Elite Trekking Pole

£60

Folded length: 49cm

The test: Known for their record-holding tents (lightest in the world), you'd think that their new line of poles would be superlight, however they're the second heaviest (532g/pair). They may not have shed grams, but they have cut folded length impressively, meaning an easy fit in your luggage. Made from aluminium alloy, they offer an external clip lock coupled with a pull and click system that works well. Rather than telescopic, it splits and folds neatly away. The handle is a comfy foam with no unwanted ridges, though it doesn't extend far down the pole like others. The adjustable leash is not padded, but it is flatlock stitched for comfort. These are only available in unisex and as a pair.

The verdict: The budget end of the scale: a good design, reasonable weight and a great pack length for your money.

Features: ★★★★★

Length & weight: ★★★★★

Design: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Ease of use: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

www.terra-nova.co.uk



BLACK DIAMOND Distance Carbon FLZ

£140

Folded length: 37cm

The test: Hitting the scales at a miniscule 348g/pair, these are the lightest on test. Not only are they weight friendly, but also length friendly too – meaning an ideal pair to pack in your luggage. Made from carbon, they are both part-telescopic and part-foldable, due to an external lock and pull and click operating system. The foam handle is well padded and longer than a standard length, however ridges added in for breathability are a potential blister causer and the adjustable strap is not padded either – maybe a weight-saving device gone too far. As with most high-end poles these are only available as a pair; happily they are available in both men's and women's specific designs.

The verdict: An excellent weight and superb length, but comfort is compromised with the handle and leash design.

Features: ★★★★★

Length & weight: ★★★★★

Design: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Ease of use: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

www.blackdiamondequipment.com



LEKI Micro Vario Carbon

£150

Folded length: 39cm

The test: A pole that certainly aims to do it all. Weighing in at 438g/pair it's the fourth lightest on test and also boasts an impressively short folded length too. It's made from 100% carbon that keeps it light, but Leki have opted not to skimp on comfort, with a nice foam handle with a good length and no ridges (at least on the main handle, lower down there is a criss-cross design). The adjustable leash is not padded but is flatlocked fabric to avoid irritation. It too offers a combination of telescopic and folded design making them luggage-friendly, with both an external clip lock and fold and click sections that are easy to use. Available only in pairs, it comes in both men's and women's specific models.

The verdict: A good – if costly – compromise between weight and packed length that still offers comfortable handles.

Features: ★★★★★

Length & weight: ★★★★★

Design: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Ease of use: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

www.leki.com/uk





Market marvel
Visitors exit
Marrakech's medina
straight into the
life-as-theatre energy
of Djemaa el-Fna

MOROCCO

TRIP PLANNER

It's the most accessible hit of exotica, with everything from Saharan dunes to high peaks to manic medinas. Here's how to get the most out of marvellous Morocco

WORDS PAUL CLAMMER



Morocco Trip Planner

Morocco offers a little bit of everything. Its landscapes sweep from dramatic coastline over high mountain ranges to the sands of the Sahara. Its culture and cuisine reflects its historic position as a crossroads of the Arab, African and European worlds.

Its vibrant cities straddle the divide between medieval and modern with wit and energy.

I still remember my first time in Marrakech, feeling bewildered in the maze of its traditional medina but always being sucked back to the pulsing energy of the Djemaa el-Fna square – a hive of musicians, acrobats, steaming pots and smoking braziers. Everything was loud, uncompromising, thoroughly joyful. On that trip, I hopped, skipped and jumped my way to Morocco by bus from London, but these days the cheap flight revolution has helped transform the country's tourism, and Marrakech is an accessible four-hour flight from a host of regional British airports, as well as easily reachable from other European hubs.

Where once there were only cheap and grungy hotels, now there are fashionable riads, the traditional Moroccan home-turned-boutique guesthouses that have become the country's signature accommodation option. The pots and braziers are still there, but now alongside them are restaurants offering modern twists on traditional Moroccan cuisine that goes well beyond the tagine.

Morocco has embraced 21st century tourism while keeping a strong hold on its identity. You'll experience this in the exchanges you have with villagers while trekking in the mountains, in your shopkeeper banter in the traditional souks, in the laidback cafe culture of the vibrant cities. Morocco indeed has got everything, not least the warmest of welcomes. ►





TOP TIP

Take home some *ras el hanout* ('head of the shop'), a blend of a dozen-or-so spices that gives Moroccan food its distinct flavour. Every spice merchant's blend is slightly different, so sample a few.



**Tanned and
glammed**

City stoppers can take
in the tanneries at Fez
and (right) the
Mauresque splendours
of Hassan II Mosque on
the Casablanca beach



◀ CITIES

BEST FOR: MOVIES, MEDINAS AND MAYHEM

ROUTE: Casablanca • Rabat • Meknès • Fès • Marrakech

Morocco has been a kingdom for centuries, and a succession of dynasties has left it with a storied succession of imperial centres of power: Marrakech, Fès, Meknès and current capital Rabat. However, start in Morocco's modern commercial hub: Casablanca. It's not quite the dream city of black-and-white movie fame (although a replica Rick's Bar plays it again every night, Sam), but the architecture is the big draw – the city is the home of Mauresque:



French art deco mixed with traditional Islamic motifs. While you're looking up at the buildings, you won't fail to miss the 210m-high minaret of the Hassan II Mosque. Tours are offered – it's one of the few Moroccan mosques that non-Muslims may enter.

Rabat is worth a diversion, for its ancient kasbah overlooking the coast and fancy restaurants. However, the time-poor should carry straight on to overlooked Meknès, with some of its grandest imperial architecture still standing, including the mighty gate of Bab Mansour and the Heri es Souani (subterranean granaries). Meknès is also the gateway to an even older capital, the ruined Roman city of Volubilis, and the town of Moulay Idriss next door, named for the ruler who brought Islam to Morocco; his shrine is an important pilgrimage site.

If Rabat is Morocco's political capital, and Casablanca is its business centre, the country's spiritual heart is found in Fès. The city's old

medina is a mesmerising maze of endless alleys and blind turns, impenetrable to cars (though watch out for mules and donkeys). Hidden in its lanes are celebrated mosques, pungent leather tanneries and hole-in-the-wall workshops producing traditional

crafts. Do explore and don't be afraid of getting lost at least once. Fès has

also carved a name for itself as a festival city: the Sufi Festival (April) and Sacred Music Festival (May) are both worth planning your trip around.

Finally, all roads lead to Marrakech, the city that once took in caravans from across the Sahara. These days the trade is in

tourism: it was here that the riad was first born. But the hustle is mostly good-natured. The street theatre of the Djemaa el-Fna is where the action is. Alternatively, find calm in the shadow of the Koutoubia Minaret or the Yves Saint Laurent-designed Majorelle Gardens, before heading out to dine in Marrakech's gourmet restaurants. ►

DID YOU KNOW?

Unlike most of the Muslim world, Morocco doesn't care for domes on its mosques. Instead, look for pointed roofs and distinctive square minarets.

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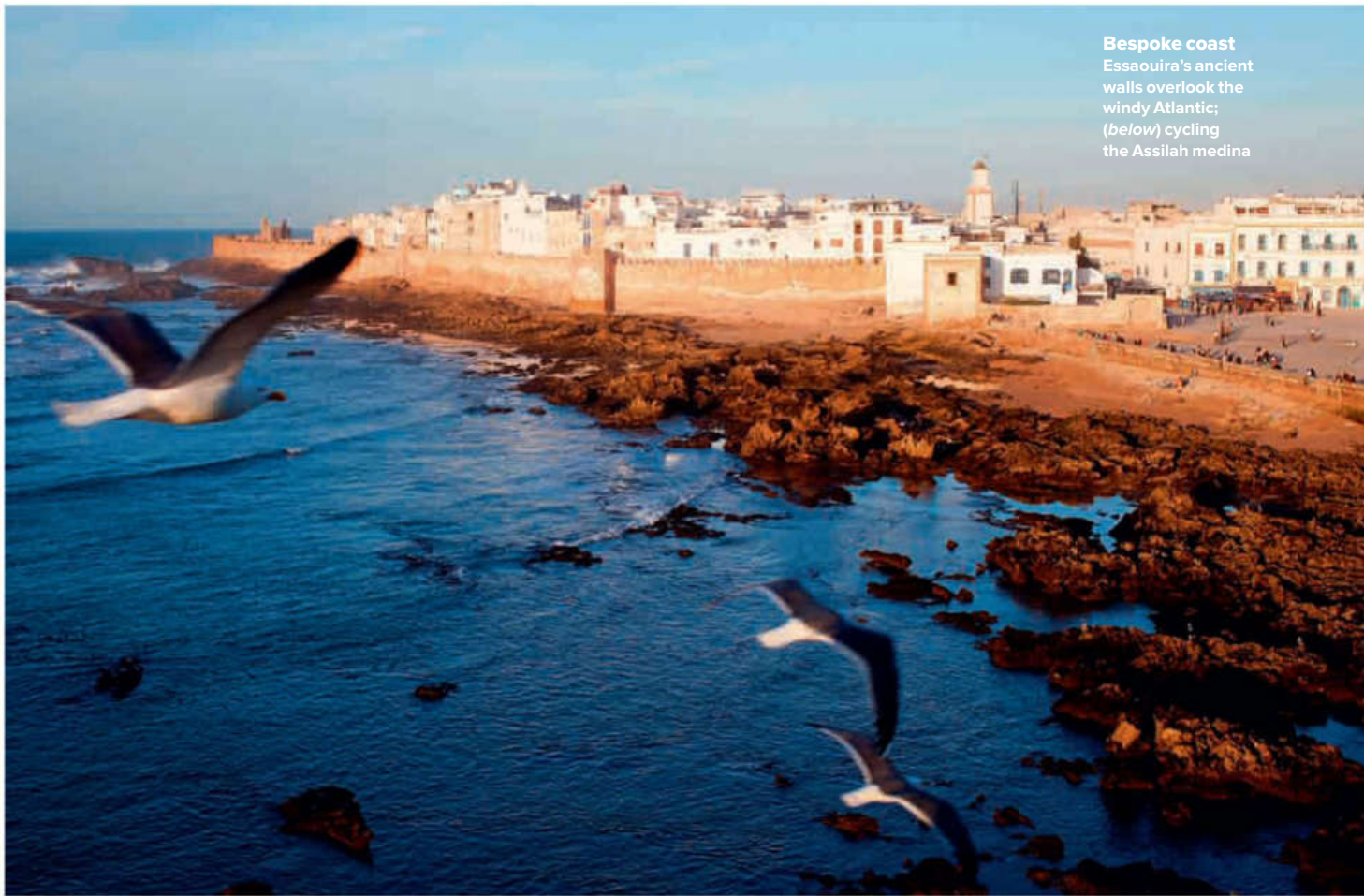
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Essaouira's ancient walls overlook the windy Atlantic; (below) cycling the Assilah medina

◀ COAST

BEST FOR: ARTISTS, LIBERTINES, SURFERS AND SLURPERS

ROUTE: Tangier • Assilah • Oualidia • Essaouira • Sidi Ifni



Morocco has a staggering 1,835km of coastline; the *entrepôt* of Tangier guards the Straits of Gibraltar, which links the two. Crossing the straits from Spain is a classic way to enter Morocco, although these days ferries sail to the new Tangier Med port some 45km east of the city rather than docking at the foot of the medina. However, the city still bears traces of its libertine days as an international zone, not least the fascinating American Legation Museum, which documents Tangier's history.

Less than an hour's train ride away is the old port of Assilah, where the Atlantic air and whitewashed walls have provided inspiration for a small artist colony. Not content with sticking to canvas, Assilah literally covers itself with art during its festival (July), giving its walls over to murals and other street art.

Casablanca (see p81) now looks more away from the sea rather than towards it, so when

the train line cuts inland, continue south by road to break the journey with a stop at Oualidia – a seaside village famed for its oysters, sold straight off the boats and guzzled on the beach with a twist of lemon. Then continue on to the fishing port of Essaouira; buttressed with Portuguese ramparts, it's another centre for Moroccan artists and

TOP TIP

Along with rugs and finely tooled leatherwork, shop for pottery, embroidery and jewellery. Essaouira is known for its *thuya* woodwork, but be aware that the tree from which it's made is now a locally endangered species.

offers some charming riads to stay in. Eat the catch of the day, freshly grilled up in the town square, then walk the ramparts or the wide beach (spectacular at sunset). Essaouira also dubs itself the 'windy city', and there's no shortage of kite-boarding and windsurfing options, either on the town beach or 25km south at the surfers' village of Sidi Kaouki.

To experience the best of the Atlantic coast, continue south towards Sidi Ifni, which is strewn with Spanish art deco architecture. The beaches are wild and rugged here, with the red sandstone arches at Legzira Plage providing a dramatic finale. ▶



◀ DESERT

BEST FOR: SAHARAN SANDS, TWO WAYS

ROUTE: Ouarzazate • Aït-Benhaddou • Drâa Valley • Zagora • Erg Chigaga / Ziz Valley • Erfoud • Merzouga • Erg Chebbi

Few things say 'North Africa' quite like the Sahara. In Morocco, when the ridges of the Atlas Mountains finally fall away, this great ocean of sand takes over. Ouarzazate is the best launch pad for a trip into the desert. It's home to the Atlas Film Studio, the hub of Morocco's film industry; the magnificent kasbah of nearby Aït-Benhaddou – something of a movie star itself – is well worth a short diversion.

From Ouarzazate, head south down the Drâa Valley, where the landscape becomes

increasingly arid and rocky, and the only splashes of green are the carpets of palm groves that crop up whenever water is plentiful. At the head of the valley is Zagora, staging post for organising camel treks into the desert. The main attraction is a three-hour drive away, at Erg Chigaga. These are the giant sand dunes of your dreams, sculpted by the wind and changing colour throughout the day, from gold at dawn to peach at sunset. Guides delight in wearing Tuareg-inspired blue robes, and will have you wrapped up in

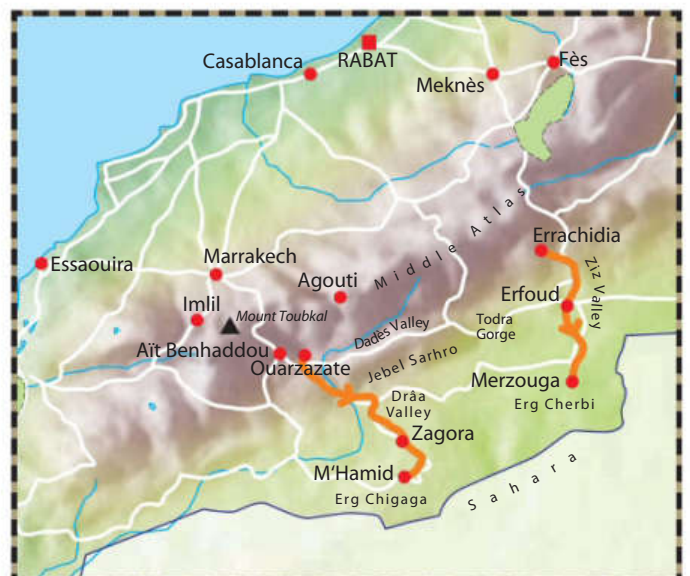
a *shesh* (headscarf) and on top of a camel before you can say Lawrence of Arabia.

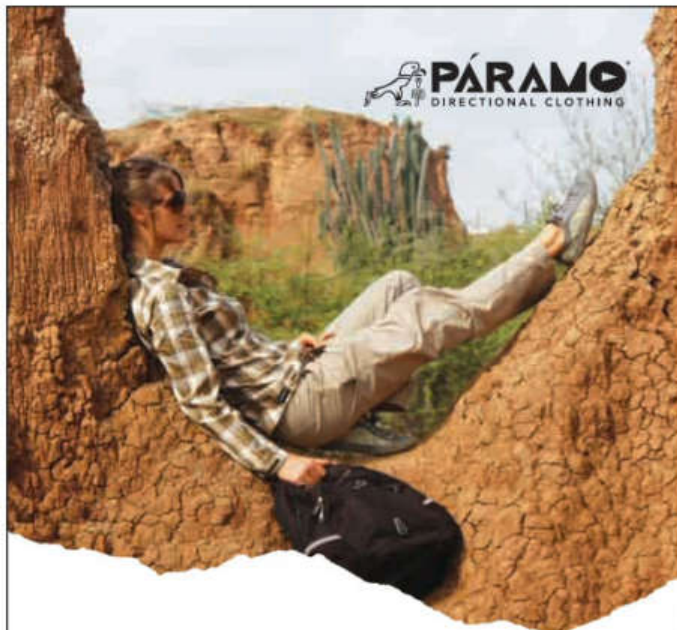
If you're travelling south from Fès, a good alternative is to head towards Morocco's other great dunes at Erg Chebbi, via the bluffs and gorges of the Ziz Valley and the desert town of Erfoud. Arrange your camels at Merzouga, but time your visit well: paved roads (and coach trips) have reached this once-sleepy hamlet, so travel in the winter when tourism is lightest, or be prepared to head further into the desert to escape the crowds. ►

The Desert Express
A camel train moseys through Erg Chebbi in the Sahara

DID YOU KNOW?

That unusual script written on Moroccan government buildings next to Arabic and French is *Amazigh* – this Berber language was finally given official status in 2011.





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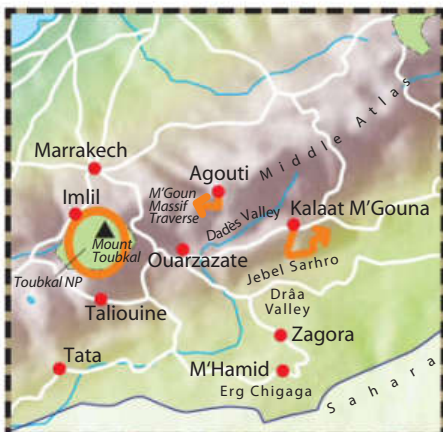
DID YOU KNOW?

Morocco has a well-established wine industry. Vineyards are mostly found around Meknès. Some of the reds are gutsy, but the gris, rosés and whites can be crisp and refreshing.

◀ MOUNTAINS

BEST FOR: POPULAR PEAK-BAGGING TO OFFBEAT RIF

ROUTE: Toubkal • M'goun • Jebel Saghro • Chefchaouen • Talassemtane National Park



Four mountain ranges ripple in waves across Morocco from the sea to the Sahara. The Rif Mountains rise from the Mediterranean shore, before subsiding into the plains of the north. Next it's the turn of the Middle Atlas, which draw breath only to give way to an even higher and more rugged range – the High Atlas. When the High Atlas begin to peter out, the Anti-Atlas take over, presenting one last bastion before the desert begins. All offer the chance for exploration – from day hiking to hardcore trekking.

Marrakech is the perfect entry point for the High Atlas mountains. Top of many people's lists is Mount Toubkal (4,167m), North Africa's highest mountain. It's not a technical climb, but it takes two days, starting at the Berber village of Imlil and staying overnight at a mountain refuge. The route up Toubkal is marked and popular, but you'll need a guide if you opt instead for a seven-day circuit around the peak; you'll trek with mules and camp in the remotest parts of the range. April to June are the favoured months, with the best weather and prettiest wildflowers.

A shorter trek is the M'goun Massif traverse, a four-day hike through mountains and deep gorges braided with silver rivers; the trailhead is at Agouti in the Aït Bougomez Valley. A good alternative is the Jebel Saghro trek, a six-day hike through mountain pastures, mesas and palm groves in narrow valleys overlooked by mud-brick kasbahs.

In the Rif, the blue-washed town of Chefchaouen is the ideal base from which to head into the mountains. The peaks are gentler here, but you'll likely have the slopes of Talassemtane NP to yourself. There are plenty of day hikes, but those looking for something more long distance should try the five-day trek to Bab Taza, via the weird geological formation of God's Bridge. You might spot Barbary apes – Morocco's only non-human primate, and cousin to those that live on Gibraltar. 🐒



More online

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for full footnotes on Morocco including:

♦ When to visit ♦ How to visit ♦ Where to stay



Morocco Footnotes

VITAL STATISTICS

Capital: Rabat
Population: 33.3 million
Language: Arabic, Berber (Amazigh), French
Time: GMT (Mar-Oct GMT+1)
International dialling code: +212
Visas: Not required by UK nationals
Money: Moroccan dirham (MAD), currently 15MAD to the UK. ATMs are widespread but credit cards are only useful in larger cities and major tourist areas.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

■ Temperatures soar across the country – 40°C not unusual in places. Ramadan is 6 June–5 July 2016: abstinence from eating and drinking in public during long hot days can be tiring for travellers.

■ **Spring and autumn:** best times to visit; dry, warm weather across the country.

■ **Winter:** bright and warm in south (Marrakech is busy at Christmas and New Year); damp and chilly in the north.

Health & safety

No vaccinations required. Crime against visitors is low. Marijuana (*kif*) is grown in Morocco and smoked widely, but is illegal. Ensure you take out a comprehensive travel insurance policy (wanderlustinsurance.co.uk).

Further reading & information

Morocco (Lonely Planet, 2014), co-authored by the writer of this article
The Caliph's House (Bantam, 2006) by Tahir Shah is witty account of restoring an old villa in Casablanca, where trouble with builders quickly escalates into exorcising their resident *djinn*s.
The Last Storytellers: Tales from the Heart of Morocco (IB Tauris, 2013) by Richard Hamilton collects enough stories from Marrakech's traditional bards to keep you going for 1,001 nights.



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THE TRIP



Getting there

National carrier **Royal Air Maroc** (royalairmaroc.com) flies direct from London Heathrow to Casablanca. Flights from £242 return (3hr 15mins)

Easyjet (easyjet.com) flies to Marrakech from Gatwick, Bristol, Manchester and Glasgow; to Essaouira from Luton; and Agadir from Gatwick. **Ryanair** (ryanair.com) flies to Marrakech from Stansted and Luton, and to Fès and Rabat from Stansted. Fares start from as low as £60 return.



Getting around

Morocco's **trains are reliable, affordable and the best way to travel** between cities (oncf.ma). For destinations off the network, the national coach company, CTM (ctm.ma), is a good alternative.

Local **buses are cheap but slow** – better to use a 'grand taxi' (shared taxi) for short hops between towns. Internal flights all route through Casablanca no matter the destination, and aren't great value for money.



Cost of travel

Morocco is a destination for travellers of all budgets. **Food and transport are good value**, and entrance fees are generally very low. There are good cheap hotels and restaurants, as well as high-end guesthouses and (increasingly) fine dining in places such as Marrakech.

Tipping is expected – always leave an extra dirham even when paying for a drink at a café.



Accommodation

All cities boast a good number of options. There are backpacker hostels in all the main destinations. **Those with higher budgets can stay in riads**, boutique hotels converted from traditional medina townhouses. The very best are concentrated in Marrakech and Fès.



Food & drink

The slow-cooked **tagine** is Morocco's most iconic dish, and is available everywhere; common ingredients include lamb, chicken, vegetables and dried fruits. **Couscous** is as popular, but tends to be served only on Fridays. Cooked salads are always worth investigating.

Good street food abounds, from **kefta** (kebabs) to fried fish and **makoda** (battered potato balls), always followed by mountains of fresh fruit. Sitting in street cafés is a national pastime (at least for men). Nurse a strong black coffee or sweet mint tea and watch the world go by.

MOROCCO HIGHLIGHTS



1 Fès

Founded 1,200 years ago, this city has the largest medieval Arab medina in the world – a winding labyrinth to explore and get gloriously lost in.

2 Djemaa el-Fna, Marrakech

Equal parts circus, market place and open-air restaurant, this public square is the noisy hub around which life in the Marrakech medina revolves.

3 Essaouira

Guarded by impressive ramparts and refreshed by Atlantic breezes, this white-and-blue fishing port is Morocco's most charming coastal destination.

4 The Sahara

The giant dunes of Erg Chebbi and Erg Chigaga are Morocco's entry points into the desert. Saddle up a camel for a safari.

5 Ait-Benhaddou

This fortified mud-brick village is one

of Morocco's most spectacular, and has served as a set for a range of films, from *Lawrence of Arabia* to *Gladiator*.

6 High Atlas Mountains

Morocco has several impressive mountain ranges, but only the High Atlas offers trekking to the summit of Mount Toubkal, North Africa's highest peak.

7 Volubilis

The World Heritage-listed Roman ruins (*above*) are spread over several acres, with many mosaics still in situ.

8 Chefchaouen

Tucked into the Rif Mountains, this charming town is a jumble of pretty blue-washed buildings.

9 Casablanca

This modern city is packed with architectural gems, from the imposing Hassan II Mosque to a parade of art deco treasures.

5 THINGS I WISH I'D KNOWN



1 You can hire a whole grand taxi

If you're in a rush to get from A to B, turn a grand taxi (*above*) into a hire car by simply buying all six seats from the driver.

2 It's almost impossible to buy an antique carpet

They've all been shopped-out. Only buy a rug because you like it, not because you've been told it's old and valuable.

3 You should dress appropriately

Both men and women should cover their shoulders and knees; headscarves

aren't needed. In general, dress in the countryside is more conservative than in the city; in cities the medinas are more conservative than the new town (*ville nouvelle*).

4 Always use your right hand

The left hand is ritually unclean in Islam, so use the right when greeting someone or eating with your hands.

5 Guard small change jealously

Break big notes whenever you can, because Moroccans hate giving change.



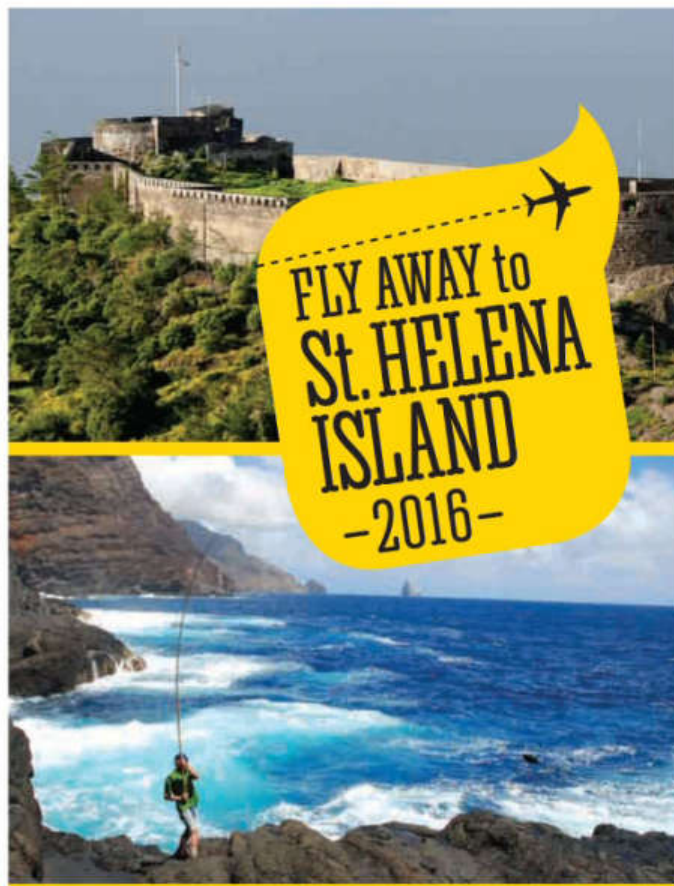
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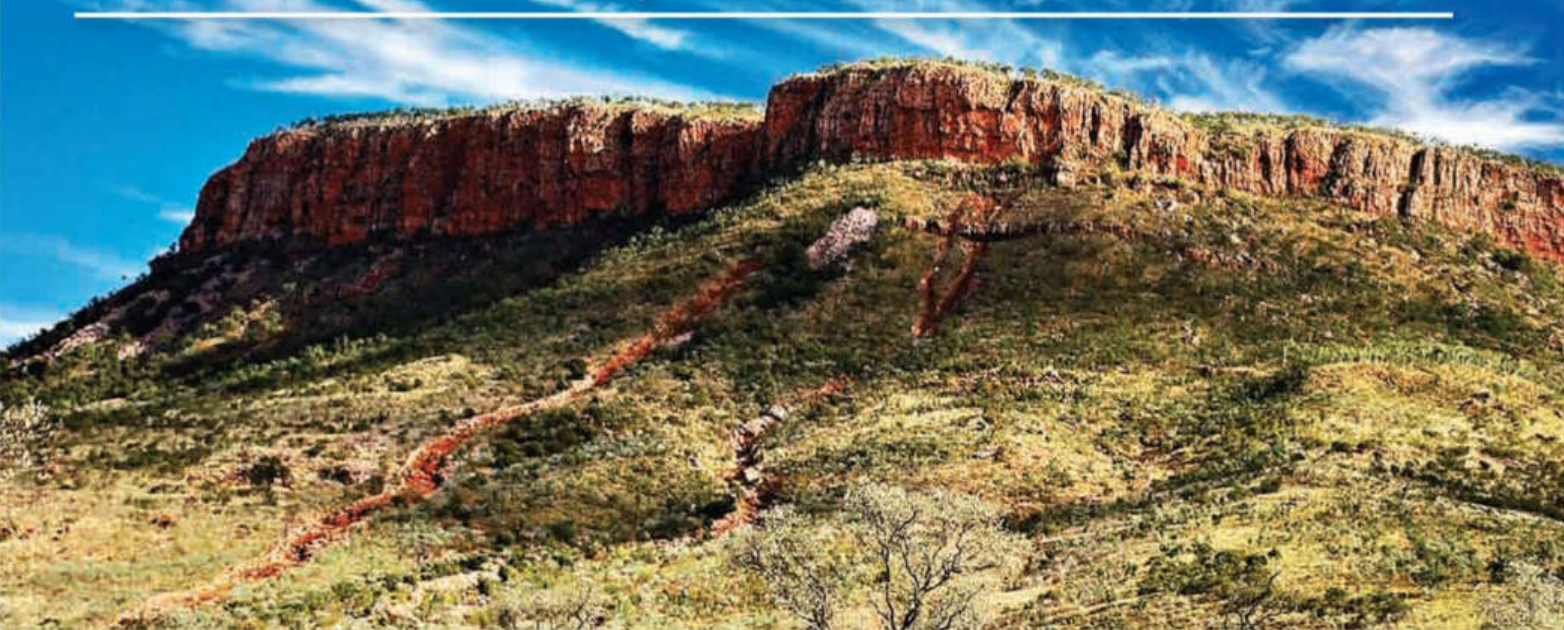
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Wanderlust

TRAVEL PHOTO OF THE YEAR 2015

ENTER AND WIN A PHOTO COMMISSION TO
WESTERN AUSTRALIA
OR £3,000 IN CASH



We've had stacks of entrants so far but there's still time to enter the *Wanderlust* Travel Photo of the Year 2015 –

the UK's biggest travel photography competition. The quality this year has again been outstanding but if you've got a classy shot sitting on your camera, then send it in.

The four category winners of our **Amateur** competition will undertake a *Wanderlust* photo commission to Western Australia (with a friend) thanks to Tourism Western Australia, while the winner of our **Portfolio** contest will take home a cash prize of £3,000.

Win a commission

AMATEUR COMPETITION

Rich in sunshine, wildlife-laden waters and dusty red rocky outcrops: just three reasons

why Western Australia is one of travel's most go-to destinations. Australia's biggest state is a boundless adventure for nature lovers with opportunities aplenty for snappers, too.

It's not just its varied landscape that attracts travellers though, its capital Perth is bubbling with culture and excitement. All this is why *Wanderlust* has teamed up with Tourism Western Australia (westernaustralia.com) to whisk four winners off to Western Australia on an extraordinary photographic commission.

How to enter

Submissions can be shot anywhere and at any time, but need to fit into one of our four categories: **People**, **Wildlife**, **Landscape** or **Travel Icons**. With the Travel Icon category, we're after subjects that have achieved landmark status in the travel world. For

example, you might have captured an unseen side of Chichen Itza or a spellbinding picture of the Great Migration in action – get your creative juices flowing and get sending!

Win £3,000!

PORTFOLIO COMPETITION

If you fancy yourself as both a storyteller and a photographer, then this is the portfolio competition is for you. Open to both amateur and professional snappers, we're looking for an attention-grabbing selection of five images, which merit their inclusion both on their own and as a whole as a gripping but concise story.

Entries in the Portfolio competition must also fit into one of our four categories: **People**, **Wildlife**, **Landscape** or **Travel Icons**. However there'll be just one winner, who will bag themselves £3,000.



Red faces
The Kimberley's
Cockburn Range offers
visitors the iconic reds
of Western Australia



GET WILD IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

A rich array of outback animals hop, swim and slither through these rugged red landscapes and crystal clear waters – a haven for wildlife watchers and photographers alike. Visit the gorges of Cape Range National Park to spot the state's iconic red kangaroo and the rare black-footed rock wallaby, while Rottnest Island, just off the coast from Perth, is home to the friendly marsupial, the quokka (*pictured above*).

Reptile lovers won't be disappointed either – there's over 400 species here, including the thorny devil and giant goanna lizards in Francois Peron National Park and Shark Bay World Heritage Area. Meanwhile freshwater crocs patrol the inlets and wetlands of Kimberley's remote wildernesses, where the coastline boasts the bigger saltwater version; spot them around Derby and Broome.

Don't forget to crane your neck skywards as Western Australia is bursting with birdlife. Head to Cape Arid National Park near Esperance and Eighty Mile Beach to see the majestic wedge-tailed eagle, red-tailed parrots, rainbow lorikeets and more.

Discover this fantastic fauna for yourself when you travel with Tourism Western Australia. www.westernaustralia.com

NIKON CAMERA PRIZES FOR THE RUNNERS-UP

Didn't bag the Western Australia trip? Never mind, *all* our Runners Up and Highly Commended entrants will win amazing Nikon cameras. The Runners Up can get new perspectives with the Nikon D5500 + 18-55 VR II lens camera kit (RRP £719.99) – a light, user-friendly model packed with vari-angle touch-screen display, WiFi, 24.2-megapixel resolution and full HD



filming. Meanwhile, our Highly Commended entrants will become proud owners of the Nikon COOLPIX P610 (RRP £339.99). For more info, head to www.nikon.co.uk



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Destinations
the holiday & travel show
Manchester EventCity 21 - 24 Jan 2016
Olympia London 4 - 7 Feb 2016

To enter, and for the full T&Cs, **visit** www.travelphotooftheyear.co.uk.
Closing date for entries is 31 October 2015. **Best of luck!**

Relaxing revolutions
Local cycling guide
Tiago Fortuna rides
through Porto Martins
near Praia da Vitória on
Terceira's east coast



DARWIN'S DOWNTIME

Volcanic peaks, picturesque towns, whale-filled waters and now a new Darwin-inspired bike trail – here's why the Azorean island of Terceira is the natural selection

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS **GRAEME GREEN**

A

the oldest city in the Azores, was a 'very clean and tidy place'.

Standing on the high viewpoint of Monte Brazil, looking over the sheltered Angra Bay where the *Beagle* would've anchored, I wondered what Darwin would've made of the city today, a UNESCO World Heritage site with a thriving harbour filled with yachts, motorboats and whale-watching cruises, surrounded by peaceful streets, colonial-style buildings, modern restaurants and bars. There are even a few good shops, though on that front Terceira still lags behind the Azores' cosmopolitan (and largest) hub island São Miguel.

Darwin actually spent less than four days here – and they call the man a genius! – arriving in September 1836, his final stop on his way back to Britain at the end of his fruitful world tour that included the Galápagos, Australia and South Africa. Angra, the former capital of the Azores' nine volcanic islands, was an important stop for ships. "It was like a self-service station in the middle of the Atlantic," my guide, Tiago Fortuna, told me. "Darwin probably came here to refuel the boat, get supplies, make repairs."

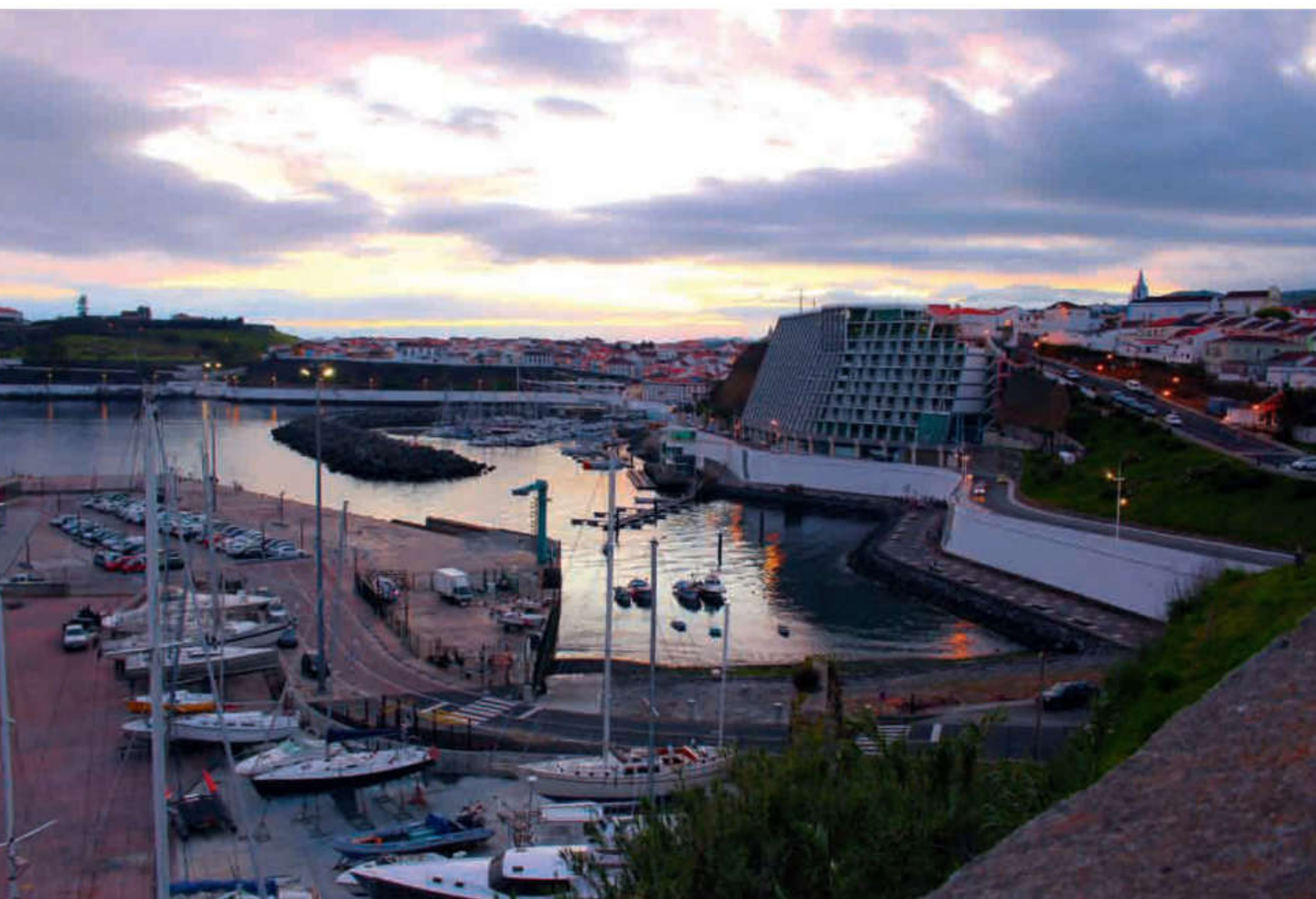
s first impressions go, it's fair to say that Charles Darwin wasn't too impressed with Terceira. 'There are no good shops and little signs of activity, excepting the intolerable creaking of an occasional bullock wagon,' the scientist noted in his diary in 1836. However, he did grudgingly concede that Angra do Heroísmo,

The curious scientist borrowed a horse and spent his time on Terceira exploring. Using the locations he noted in his diary and the roads he would've travelled, Tiago has created a day-long cycling route, the Darwin Trail, which lets visitors do a little 'research' of their own. While busy São Miguel may be the Azores' headline act now, the much less developed Terceira gently buzzes with the promise of a wilder adventure. I had a feeling that after my own days on the island – on and off the cycle route – I wouldn't be left quite as underwhelmed as the man the trail's named after.

In Darwin's hoof-steps

Like Darwin, Tiago and I set off from Angra. But there's a long, steep hill leading out of the city, so we got a jeep to drop us and our bikes at the centre of the island – a small cheat, but we are intelligent, highly evolved apes, after all. Our 47km ride started near Pico de Bagacina, a tranquil spot with chaffinches singing and buzzards circling overhead. As we set off, Tiago pointed to a series of blackened domes on the hills to the west, known as Mistérios Negros (Black Mysteries), from the island's last major volcanic eruption in 1761.

Darwin wrote that Terceira's heath, fern, pastureland and stone walls reminded him of Wales, while there were 'some old English friends among the insects, and of birds, the starling, water wagtail, chaffinch and blackbird'. I caught the same sense of familiarity, though it's clear from the scent of sulphur and steam rising out of the ground as we entered Furnas do Enxofre – a protected volcanic reserve Darwin visited – that we weren't in the UK anymore. We parked the bikes and walked to a colourful steaming crater. "Furnas do Enxofre is still absolutely wild, not damaged by man," Tiago told me. "It's still like it was when Darwin was here." ►





Hitting the trail
(clockwise from this)
Tiago checks out a row of hydrangeas, the Azores' national flower; smoke rises from the grounds around Furnas do Enxofre; Angra harbour looks very different to when Charles Darwin anchored here in 1836



Nature's bounty
Cows relax on the hillsides; a fin whale cuts through the water off the Angra coast; black lava walls frame the vineyards in the northern wine-making area of Biscoitos



◀ Furnas do Enxofre is an important spot; the locals say that if steam stops coming from the ground, it indicates a possible imminent eruption elsewhere. “We live in fear of eruptions, but at the same time we have the secret desire to experience it,” Tiago told me. “We never know if we might see another island being formed.”

As we rode on, the road filled with goats being led home by a local farmer. We followed and watched for a while as he moved through the pen, milking each goat in turn – there were 300. The farmer handed us a pan of rich, warm milk, fresh from the teat.

It was Terceira's inhabitants that made the biggest impression on Darwin. ‘I do not recollect ever having beheld a set of handsomer young men, with more good humoured pleasant expressions,’ he wrote of the impoverished locals he encountered.

He was also taken with the roads the locals used, many of them utilising smooth ‘streams of hummocky basaltic lava’. Tiago led me off the main road to a rocky section of 2,000-year-old lava flow. “This road was known as Passagem das Bestas, or ‘the Way of the Beasts’,” he told me. “This was one of the main connections to the centre of the island, a place to collect wood.” He pointed to deep grooves cut into the lava, which Darwin recorded: ‘I noticed in several places, from the long traffic of the bullock wagons, that the solid lava, which formed in parts the road, was worn into ruts of the depth of 12 inches.’

We soared downhill, riding roads lined with colourful hydrangeas – at least, until we turned a corner only to discover the road blocked by a herd of bovine bollards.



The island's cattle outnumber its 55,000 humans by two-to-one. “A traffic jam,” Tiago suggested wryly.

The scenery shifted colours as the trail moved from farmland to lava trails, cutting through the cool shade of forests, then the peaceful whitewashed village of Fontinhas, with views of the northeastern coastline. We rolled down cobbled streets in the town of Praia da Vitória to the beach. “Horrible day,” joked Tiago as we sat on the sand, eating lunch alongside the gently lapping ocean.

In the afternoon we rode southwards through a salty port where fishermen and women were laying out their lines, past the industrial zone and along the coast, the deep-blue Atlantic to our side. “Darwin was smarter than us. He did this on a horse, not a bike,” Tiago

laughed as we huffed our way uphill in the afternoon sun, the road curving around a white lighthouse and rolling up and down for several miles to Salga Bay, our final stop. A cold beer, sipped while overlooking the bay, closed one of the most enjoyable days of cycling I'd done in years.

Natural selections

Darwin didn't spend time studying Terceira. His assistant, who usually helped him take notes, stayed back at the harbour. “Maybe this was time for relaxing,” suggested Tiago, as we drove out to Pico do Gaspar next day. “I think he'd been so impressed by the Galápagos, when he got to Terceira, he was just curious to explore the island. And maybe people on Terceira at that time didn't have scientific knowledge and didn't show him the really interesting places to look.”



‘We spent the day exploring the island’s high coastal viewpoints, hidden lava tunnels in farmers’ fields and vineyards on the north coast, the land divided into sections by walls of black lava’

There’s certainly plenty on the island that could have enticed him to stay longer, if he didn’t already have five years’ worth of samples to study and the small task of writing *On The Origin Of Species* to get to (as if that was going to go anywhere...). Terceira today has the biggest national park in the Azores and the most diverse habitats of any island in the archipelago, from caves to cloudforest and grasslands.

We left the cycles and bike trails behind us to examine the rest of the island, starting with a climb up Pico do Gaspar, near the island’s centre, to a pristine, green cauldron of plant life in the collapsed chimney of the volcano, many of the plants endemic to Terceira. Later, we spent the day exploring the island’s high coastal viewpoints, hidden lava tunnels in farmers’ fields and vineyards on the north coast, the land divided into sections by walls of black lava.

In the afternoon, we made our way down dank tunnels into Algar do Carvão, a cavern complex in an empty volcano. Local *montanheiro* (mountaineer) guide Ramiro Barbosa pointed to “probably the biggest formed silica stalactites in the world”, before we made our way down to the old magma chamber. “There would have been over 1,000°C of heat coming out of here,” Ramiro explained. “It would have been a moving liquid, with incredible heat and power.” It’s now a chilly underground lake, with rain dripping in from above and an Eno-esque ambient soundtrack playing through speakers. What a difference a few millennia make.

Trails & whales

The boggy trails through Santa Barbara’s cloudforest – the island’s highest point at over 1,000m – awaited Tiago and I the next morning. The fog drifted in over the juniper bushes. “What you find here is the type of vegetation as the first settlers found it. It’s very well preserved,” Tiago explained. Ancient plant species from around the world are found here, the seeds carried and deposited by birds on their Atlantic crossings. “It’s like a Noah’s Ark for plants.”

The Azores’ mid-Atlantic position also makes for an interesting mix of marine species. “We get a bit of everything,” scuba instructor Devin Leary told me the next day in Angra. “Because of our location, we get all kinds of things passing by that people don’t expect.” We geared up and jumped into the cool Atlantic at Angra Bay, swimming under the water where the *Beagle* once rested. There are nine wrecks in the bay, including the *Lidador*, a 78m-long British steam ship that sunk here in 1878. Triggerfish are nesting around the wreck’s mid-section, while blue damselfish hover among the rocks, guarding their eggs.

The creatures we came across underwater reminded me just how much Darwin’s discoveries have shaped how we view the natural ►



Botanist's dream
(clockwise from this)
Greenery frames the
opening of the dormant
volcano leading to the
Algar do Carvão cavern
complex; Pico Matias
Simão is found between
Biscoitos and Altares;
hiking the foggy boggy
trails in the Santa
Barbara cloud forest;
star-like flowers grow in
the island's high spots



Paddling in the Praia Darwin might not have been taken by Praia da Vitória, but we found solace in its soulful peacefulness



‘Out in the deep water, we located three fin whales by the hissing spouts sprayed from their blowholes, then saw their bus-sized black bodies curving through the ocean’

◀ world. I spotted a flounder laying flat against the ocean floor, its top a perfect recreation of the hue and texture of the sand, making it near-invisible. “They can change their pattern and colour depending on what sand they’re on,” Devin informed me between dives.

We also saw a huge octopus camouflaged among the rocks and a pair of flying gurnards engaged in a mating display. The gurnard is a strange creature, a fish with blue-fringed wings used mainly to scare off larger predators but also thought to be used during courtship; it also has ‘legs’ that are used both for ‘walking’ and as little feelers for searching through the sand for food. All of these underwater wonders have evolved in ways to help them survive and thrive, to ensure the continuation of the species.

There are whales in these waters, too – some local, others passing through on migratory journeys. Until the late 1900s, they were hunted, a major industry in the Azores. I sailed out from Angra with marine biologist Breno Toste. Out in the deep water, we located three fin whales by the hissing spouts sprayed from their blowholes, then saw their bus-sized black bodies curving through the ocean. “You can see how calm this whale is,” says Breno, pointing to a 14m specimen swimming alongside us. “This is the kind of whale that most likes to play with the boat. They can reach 24m. It’s the second-largest mammal in the world, after the blue whale.”

But it wasn’t just the whales that were taking a friendly interest in our vessel. As we made our way back to the harbour, a pod of dolphins playfully chased us as we went.

Last port of call

I was back on the water again for my final afternoon on Terceira. Tiago and I put a couple of kayaks in at Praia da Riviera on the island’s east coast. A turtle poked his head briefly above the surface as we paddled across the bay to Praia da Vitória. This ‘quiet forlorn little place’ – according to Darwin’s diary entry – is now a laidback seaside town of white buildings with terracotta roofs. From the hilltop above, a giant statue of the Virgin Mary silently watched us approach, keeping guard over the town.

We paddled in to the beach for a cold beer at a coastside café, then made our way back along the shore, the island’s rugged geology temporarily lost behind the wind farm turbines spinning on the green hills. But these little reflections of modernity didn’t distract me from Terceira’s more unevolved charms. Church bells rang out for a local wedding, echoing across the bay. It felt incredibly relaxing and peaceful, a million miles away from the ‘intolerable creaking of bullock wagons’ that so tormented Darwin almost 180 years ago. 📌

ISLES OF ADVENTURE

Intrigued by Terceira? Check out the rest of the Azores archipelago with our expert guide...



1 SÃO MIGUEL

São Miguel is the largest of the nine Azores islands, home to 55% of the archipelago's population. It is also the busiest island, and home to the international hub airport at Ponta Delgada. There are lakes (including the spectacular twin lakes of Sete Cidades), volcanic thermal pools, fumaroles, hot springs and craters to explore, but also more bus tours and tourists than on the other islands.



4 SÃO JORGE

Quiet and sparsely populated, São Jorge has big sea cliffs and a dramatic mountain range, with hiking and canyoning possibilities. The coastal village Fajã de Santo Cristo can only be reached on foot or by quadbike. The coastline has good surfing spots, too. The island's also known for its strong cheese.



2 PICO

Many visit Pico to bag its namesake peak, Portugal's highest (2,351m). The climb is a good day hike; alternatively, trek up late afternoon, camp at the top and climb Piquinho (the true summit) for sunrise. Pico also offers whalewatching tours and great scuba diving with manta rays (Jul-Sept) and sharks. You'll also see crater lakes and vineyards – the volcanic soil is good for wine production.



5 TERCEIRA

As this issue's article testifies, wild Terceira has plenty of adventure options, including hiking, kayaking, cycling and scuba diving, as well as whalewatching. Do take time to stroll through UNESCO-listed Angra do Heroísmo and charming Praia da Vitória. The drive along the west coast is a treat of views and villages.



3 FAIAL

The clustered trio of Pico, Faial and São Jorge are referred to as The Triangle and are easy to travel between on regular ferries. Faial (known as the Blue Island, for its profuse hydrangeas) is most famed for Horta marina, used by sailors from around the world who are crossing the Atlantic; the Peter Cafe Sport bar is a renowned yachties' meeting place. The island also has hiking trails, craters and whalewatching.



6 GRACIOSA

Graciosa (meaning 'gracious') is one of the archipelago's least-visited islands, and one of the most laidback, dotted with quiet, traditional villages and rural scenes. It's a good spot for scuba diving, with coastal caves to explore. The island is also home to Furna do Enxofre, one of Europe's largest volcanic caverns.



7 SANTA MARIA

The oldest island in the Azores, Santa Maria is where locals go for beach holidays – it's the driest and sunniest island. There's good diving here, including with manta rays in summer. The island also hosts one of Portugal's oldest music festivals, the annual Maré de Agosto (August).



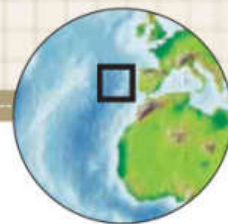
8 FLORES

One of the big draws of northerly Flores ('flowers') is its hydrangeas, the Azores' national bloom. The island's remoteness has kept it wild and natural; it's often considered the prettiest in the archipelago. There are opportunities for hiking, canyoning and birding, plus lakes and waterfalls to explore.



9 CORVO

Corvo is the smallest island, with only 400 inhabitants and a chunk of its territory taken up by a large crater speckled with lagoons – Caldeirão. Corvo is especially popular with birdwatchers who come to see the varied species that pass on their Atlantic crossings. During peak birding months (Oct-Nov), hotels can fill years in advance.



Terceira, Azores Footnotes

VITAL STATISTICS

Archipelago capital: Ponta Delgada (Terceira: Angra do Heroísmo)
Population: 250,000 (Terceira: 56,000)
Language: Portuguese
Time: GMT-1 (Mar-Oct GMT)
International dialling code: +351
Visas: Not required by UK nationals
Money: Euro (€), currently around €1.4 to the UK£

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

■ **Spring.** Sunny weather, fewer tourists. Lots of wildflowers; June is best for hydrangeas. Terceira's ten-day Sanjoaninas festival is in June. Good for whalewatching.
 ■ **Warmest, busiest months.** Good for migratory whales and scuba diving.
 ■ **Warm and quieter.** Whale migration ends in October.
 ■ **Potentially rainy and windy.** Fewer services operate. Whale migration begins in February.

Health & safety

The weather can change quickly. Check weather reports before heading into the hills, and take waterproof gear. Jellyfish have been reported in some areas around Terceira's coast – seek advice before swimming.

From May to September, Terceira holds regular 'bull-running' events, which see bulls careening through the streets; aside from the ethical issues, approach with caution for safety reasons.

Further reading & information

Darwin In The Azores by João Carlos Nunes, Susana Serpa Silva and Paulo JM Barcelos is a handy book about Darwin's time on Terceira, as well as context on how the island would've been at the time of his visit. Available locally at most gift shops.
Azores (Bradt, 2013)
www.visitazores.com – helpful official tourism site

More online

Visit www.wanderlust.co.uk/160 for links to more content:

ARCHIVE ARTICLES

- ◆ 12 best locations to see whales – online
 - ◆ Know before you go: Azores – online
 - ◆ Azores: way out west – issue 67
- ### PLANNING GUIDES
- ◆ Azores travel guide

THE TRIP

i The author travelled with **Archipelago Choice** (01768 775672, azoreschoice.com). Its seven-day *The Darwin Trail* (from £998; trips run April to October) includes flights, transfers, B&B accommodation, a day of guided cycling, cycle hire and route maps. Its seven-day *Terceira Activity Week* (from £998; trips run March to October) includes flights, transfers, B&B accommodation, a day of guided cycling, a full-day jeep tour, one day of guided walking, a half-day kayaking trip and a half-day whalewatching trip.

Two shore dives with **Arraia Divers** (arraiadivers.com) cost €100pp (£73) including gear rental.

Getting there

✈ **SATA International** (sata.pt) flies direct from Gatwick to Ponta Delgada on São Miguel every Saturday. Returns cost from £337; journey time is from 3hrs 45mins. SATA also offers inter-island connections throughout the Azores, with prices from £42pp one-way. **Ryanair** (ryanair.com) flies from Stansted to Ponta Delgada from £32.99 one way.

Getting around

🚗 It is tricky to get around Terceira without a car. Buses run between some of the island's main towns and villages, but **services are limited**. Cars can be rented for around €45-50 (£33-35) a day. The island has good roads; be aware of

parking fees around Angra and Praia. Alternatively book guided day trips.

Cost of travel

£ **Money goes a long way in the Azores.** You can get a beer for €1 and a good three-course meal for around €15-20. Tipping isn't assumed, but leaving a few euros per person is certainly appreciated.

Accommodation

🏠 **Pousada Forte São Sebastião** in Angra do Heroísmo (pestana.com/en/hotel/pousada-angra) is a 16th-century fort converted into a modern boutique hotel. It has one of the best locations in Angra, overlooking the coast, the town and the harbour. Rooms from €120 (£88).

Food & drink

🍴 Terceira is surrounded by ocean and has more cows than people so there's plenty of beef and seafood.

Alcatra, a local speciality, is beef stew slow-cooked in white wine for up to 12 hours; Ti Choa restaurant in Serreta does one of the best. **Sopa do mer**, a creamy seafood soup served inside a loaf of bread, is another popular dish. **Tuna, conger and limpets are common.**

Beira Mar in São Mateus is a hard-to-beat seafood restaurant. The harbourside **Cais D'Angra** and the tapas-serving **Tasca das Tias** are both recommended in Angra. **Vegetarians will struggle.** Terceira cafes are filled with pastries, including the local cinnamon-flavoured Dona Amélia cakes. Try the **white wines** produced in the north of Terceira and on Pico island.

5 THINGS I WISH I'D KNOWN

1 Get geared up for the Darwin Trail

A pair of padded cycling shorts make cycling the kilometres of the Darwin Trail much more comfy. You'll be out in the sun all day, so bring sunscreen, sunglasses and a large refillable water bottle.

2 Make flexible plans

The weather can change quickly on this mid-Atlantic island. It's good to be flexible and be ready to reschedule excursions and whale trips if conditions demand it.

3 Take a solid pair of boots

The steps inside Algar do Carvão are wet and the island's higher hills can be quite boggy, so a good waterproof pair of walking boots come in handy.

4 Bring your rain gear

A warm sunny island most of the time, rain can come in quickly – it's worth packing a good waterproof jacket and trousers, especially for hiking or cycling.

5 Get up early for whales

Whale-spotting boats go out twice or more per day, but locals recommend going in the morning for best sightings.

6 Take your wetsuit

The Atlantic waters around the island are on the nippy side. If you're planning to dive or spend a lot of time snorkelling and you have your own long or short wetsuit, it's worth taking it with you. Dive companies also hire gear.



Fields of greens
 The lush, peaceful farmers' plots lie in the shadow of a collapsed volcano

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FROM THE ROAD

Letters, tips, photos & exploits from you, our endlessly adventurous readers

★ WINNER ★

Almost not buying a Panama hat in Ecuador

By David Higham

As any fool knows, Panama hats do not come from Panama; they are made in Ecuador. Travelling to Ecuador, I was bound to buy a Panama hat. They're not even called Panama hats anyway; the proper name is *sombreros de paja toquilla*. Plaited by hand from the leaves of the toquilla or jipijapa palm, the wonderful art of weaving the Ecuadorian toquilla hat is on the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Armed with this knowledge I ducked into Señor Luis López Cifuentes's tiny shop on the Calle Morales in Quito. Immediately my plan went wrong. There in front of me at the top of a stand of hats was the finest Panama I'd ever seen. It was shaped somewhere between a fedora and a bowler – very stylish. It was of the palest honey colour. The weave was finer than any I had seen. This was the hat for me. The man who broke the bank at Monte Carlo would have worn a hat like this; what a dash I would cut in such a hat

Señor Cifuentes looked on with a wry smile. He had seen it all before. I lifted the hat to try it on and the label fell into my hand. I saw, as I knew I would, that it was a genuine Montecristi Superfino. Then I saw the price: \$2,000 (about £1,300).

"Made by hand. It took six months," explained Señor Cifuentes.

I looked down the rack, the hats becoming less fine as the price came down. Señor Cifuentes explained that my hat, as I had already begun to think of it, was a 62 grade, meaning that there are about 25-30 threads

■ Your Story

South American adventures

These two lovely Latin

tales were the

stars of our latest

writing competition at

wanderlust.co.uk – can

you do better?



each way in a single inch. Someone's dedicated and skilled fingers had woven each strand.

I could not imagine myself buying any lesser hat.

"That is not my finest hat, Sir," said the ever-attentive señor. "For \$2,500 you can buy a 66 grade!" My knees buckled slightly.

I left the shop knowing that I would never own such a hat and could not bear the thought of a coarser one. My wife tried to comfort me.

"You wouldn't be able to keep it clean and perfect," she said. I pointed out that if I were the sort of man who could afford such a hat, my valet would know how to look after it.

For the next week I looked sadly at other hats. It wasn't until we reached Guayaquil that I relented and bought a perfectly good Panama at a saving of \$1,950. I look quite good in it, even though I say so myself.

I had a further thought. Just suppose I had bought the \$2,000 hat. Suppose I had been sauntering along one day (one would not simply walk in a hat like that), and suppose I had seen, coming towards me, the man who had bought the \$2,500 hat. I could never have recovered from such humiliation.



Top hat
Calle Morales – or La Ronda – is the pedestrianised centre of Quito Old Town; David and hat



★ RUNNER UP ★ Ravines, condors & bandits – on the road to Peru's Cotahuasi Canyon

By Mark Chadwick

I can feel the quinoa porridge warm my insides, replenishing me after the tough, cold night. But our host seems worried, her mix of Spanish and Quechua sounding fraught. Our guide, Paul, translates.

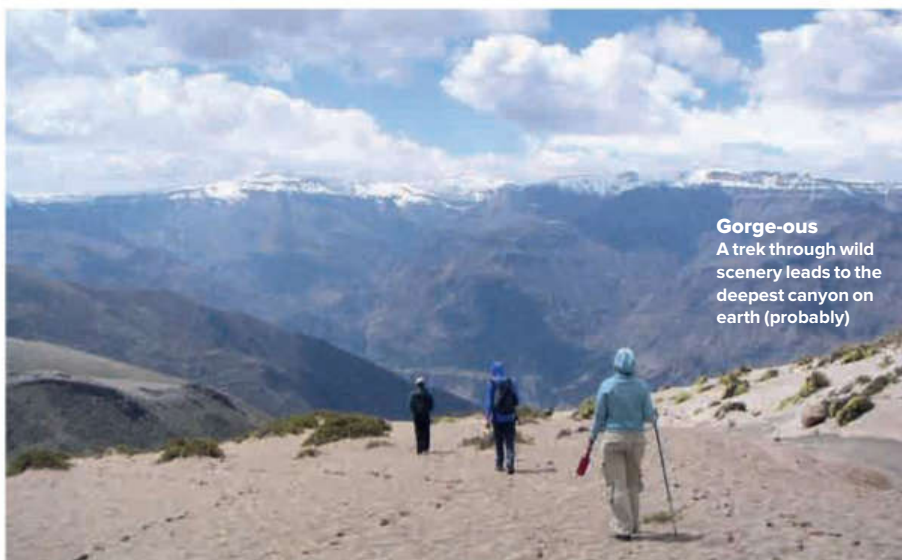
"How old are you?" he asks. I tell him, and he repeats the information back to the woman. She coos, and reaches to stroke my hair. Paul chuckles. "She thinks you are very young," he says. I ask why she seems worried. "No problem, really," he says tentatively. "She says that bandits are coming into the area, that they rob walkers. But it's fine, you shouldn't worry." A lump of porridge sticks in my throat.

Cotahuasi Canyon is (by some measures) the world's deepest at 3,354m and, remarkably, largely tourist free. The overnight journey helped to explain the lack of customers – it took a bum-numbing 12 hours to reach quaint Cotahuasi town by coach from Arequipa (South Peru) over unsurfaced, ear-popping passes. Many tourists favour the more accessible, almost-as-deep Colca. I had shivered and rattled throughout the cold, featureless night.

After breakfast we head out to arrange mules for our four-day trek. A group of boys marvel at our pasty white faces, laughing and taunting: "Hello, hello!" I reply in kind, and they run away giggling along the cobbled street. My head is spinning from tiredness and altitude as our guide leads us down a series of dirt alleys to a small adobe shack, where a toy Paddington Bear sits in the mud. Paul negotiates with the father of the family there and, after a few minutes, hands over some money. He gestures to us: "Ok, ten minutes, we wait. Coca tea?" I accept, of course (I'm practically an addict by now).

I pity the mules as they arrive; they seem sad and forlorn-looking. We pack them up with rucksacks, tents and cooking equipment, and two boys from the Paddington shack lead them ponderously away.

From here we head over a pass, where mountains ripple into the distance like waves on a stormy sea. Cappadocian pinnacles rise unexpectedly from the mountainside, temporarily plunging us into a geological maze. The cold blue sky completes the picture; circling overhead, alone in the emptiness, a condor spies us.



Gorge-ous
A trek through wild scenery leads to the deepest canyon on earth (probably)



My mind wanders back to the advice about bandits, a warning that seems out of place in such a paradise. Yet the glistening tin roofs miles below remind me of the poverty here.

The night's camp is next to a hot spring, and I wallow in its soothing waters as the setting sun turns the watching peaks pink and, slowly, the velvet night embraces us, revealing its own secrets: the Milky Way sweeping across the darkness, a glistening road to eternity.

The next day we swap one of the mules at a small hamlet – "This mule no good," Paul says, "too slow" – before heading upwards again, camping at altitude among grazing llamas. Just a few yards away, the ground disappears into a deep ravine. I make a mental note not to venture out to the loo in the night.

On the third day we traverse another pass, the landscape turning to bright orange sand dunes littered with cacti; we are temporarily on the set of a western. I stumble across a grim set of bones half concealed in the

sand. "Bandits did this?" I ask Paul, jokingly. He laughs halfheartedly, though his eyes betray a hint of terror. At the summit, a cold wind whips against us. I can feel it in my own bones, as I shudder against the forbidding panorama. The mules look on, their sad ears fraying against the breeze.

The final day brings us to Cotahuasi Canyon. From our vantage point halfway up the gorge the towering mountains look down on us, and we look down in turn at the distant river in the bottom, a thin slither of frothing silver.

Back on the coach that evening, we weave up the mountainside as the setting sun spills its last rays into the valley, bathing the villages and the patchwork potato fields in gold. There are no bandits to be seen – on the contrary, Cotahuasi seems to keep on giving.

Keep an eye out for our next writing competition at wanderlust.co.uk/mywanderlust/forum ►

■ Readers' Pictures

YOUR PHOTOS

Been somewhere beautiful? Done something amazing?

Email fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk – make us jealous!



"I took a three week trip around Europe via the train, though the highlight was a gondola ride down the **Grand Canal, Venice.**"

Charlie Green



"Our first ever go on a Segway, exploring the city of **Brisbane, Australia.** Best fun ever!"

Anita & Gerald Masters

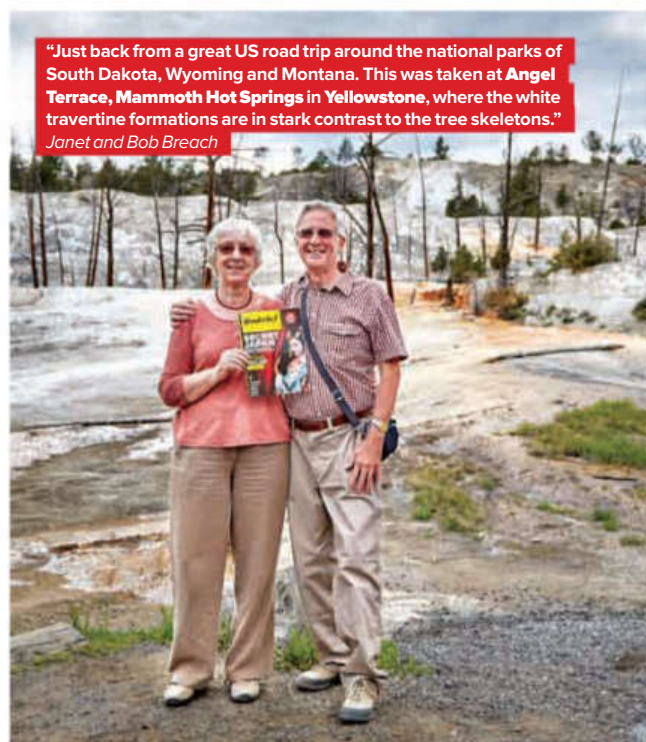


"Great hike down to the **Umbrella Falls,** near **Shushi** in **Nagorno-Karabakh.**"

Ann Clarke-Overy



"Wilson Arch, south of Moab in Utah.
A few minutes after I reached the top,
the sun was rising – I was completely
alone so I placed my camera on the
tripod and walked out in the Arch."
Frank Jørgensen



**"Just back from a great US road trip around the national parks of
South Dakota, Wyoming and Montana. This was taken at **Angel
Terrace, Mammoth Hot Springs in Yellowstone**, where the white
travertine formations are in stark contrast to the tree skeletons."**
Janet and Bob Breach

Where does your Wanderlust take you?

Every month we ask 'Where does your Wanderlust take you?', giving you a chance to win a goody bag including a versatile **High UV with Insect Shield Buff®** – the ultimate travel accessory (RRP £21). But can you beat Janet and Bob's entry (*above*)? We want to see where your Wanderlust takes you and where you take your Wanderlust!

Take your magazine with you on your next trip and share a pic with us. Post it on our Facebook wall, tweet it to us at [@wanderlustmag](https://twitter.com/wanderlustmag), email it to fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk or hashtag it [#wanderlustmag](https://www.instagram.com/wanderlustmag) on Instagram.

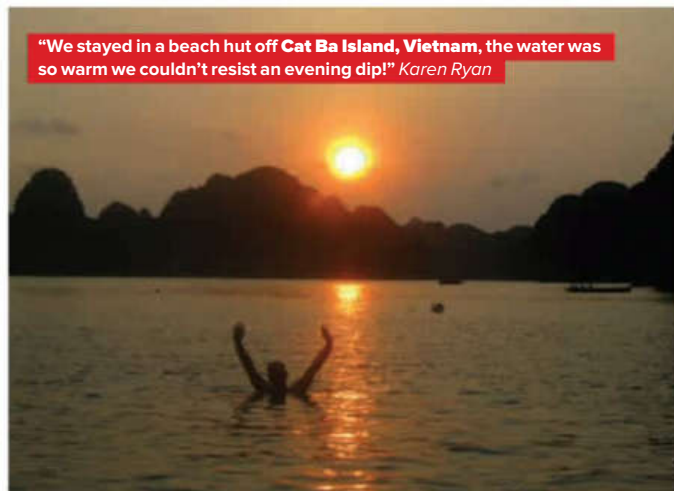


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**"Enjoying the Easter ceremonies
at San Miguel de Allende, Mexico."**
Michael Rimmer



**"We stayed in a beach hut off Cat Ba Island, Vietnam, the water was
so warm we couldn't resist an evening dip!"** *Karen Ryan*





LETTERS

Your mail and missives: this issue, Taj replicas, family travels, respecting cultures, re-visiting Moscow, coffee in Copenhagen

◀ Dip into cultures

I'm with Rachele Meilleur on the topic of stripping off at notable sites [August 2015, issue 158]. One of the joys of travel is to immerse yourself in another culture.

On a trip to a Balinese temple, I discovered that it was forbidden to enter if you were menstruating which, to my disappointment, applied to me. When I informed our guide he took it in his stride as the most natural thing in the world. I'm still glad that I chose not to enter, since I think that respecting the beliefs of other cultures is integral to appreciating how others live throughout the world. Our travels are all the richer for it.

Jane Whitewood, Lancashire

Moscow's new face

As a worldwide traveller for over 45 years, I now find myself occasionally revisiting places. My wife and I have just returned from a demanding but very rewarding 11-week journey that let me revisit Beijing, Lhasa, Ulan Bator and Moscow. The changes in all these places have been great, with some common themes including a huge growth in traffic, Chinese tourists and Western retail outlets.

But in Moscow the change seemed more profound. I first visited in 1971. Back then I was thrown out of Red Square's State Department Store for taking pictures from the top floor. Then, it was a bustling market selling cheap Soviet stock. Now, the building is the same but the outlets inside are

★ STAR LETTER ★

Taj Mahal 2

Your news article on replicas of historical landmarks [August 2015, issue 158] made interesting reading. One replica that probably deserves a mention: the Indian city of Aurangabad's horizon is dominated by a charming monument that to many might pass as the Taj Mahal. Bibi-Ka-Maqbara [right] was commissioned by Prince Azam Shah for his mother in the 17th century. Though he originally started with ambitious plans to rival the Taj (built by his grandfather), Azam Shah soon ran out of funds and what resulted was a mausoleum of much more modest proportions!

Nandini Chakraborty, Leicester



familiar Western brands. The building itself now swarms with tourists taking pictures of the place, including the very spot where I was caught back then.

Outside the store, people dress up and pose for tourists as famous Russians. In 100m I saw three Stalins, a Putin and a Lenin. Forty four years ago hundreds of Russians were queuing for hours to get a glimpse of the real thing (albeit embalmed) in his tomb in Red Square and anyone impersonating him would have been taken away very smartly. Some say you should never go back but in my experience it can be very worthwhile to see just how things have changed.

Bob Brewer, Bristol

Family tips please

I'm a new reader of your amazing magazine; it truly has inspired the wanderlust in me. I'm lucky to have travelled to some wonderful places but my plans were halted when I was diagnosed with cancer in 2003 and then, following a return to health, more little people arrived in our lives!

We'd so love to be more adventurous while meeting the needs of young kids, staying safe and keeping to a budget. I do hope to see something about this in future in *Wanderlust*.

Claire Ledger (and family), Chesterfield

Do check out wanderlust.co.uk where we have lots of family travel articles – Ed.

WIN WANDERLUST GOODIES

Each issue, our winning contribution wins a haul of *Wanderlust* gear. This time, congratulations to Nandini!



Experiences JUST BACK FROM...



Copenhagen
myWanderlust
member Polly
Allen shares her
four-day delight
in Denmark

The highlight: A tour of the Danish Parliament, near to the election. Things were pretty tense, and I learned a lot about Danish society and politics.

Must see: Christiansborg for Parliament and Amalienborg Palace, where the Royal Family live. Visit Assistens Kirkegård cemetery as an offbeat attraction (Danes have picnics there) and don't miss Nyhavn (*pictured*).

Top tip: *Twin Peaks* fans can visit the Log Lady Cafe. Order some



'damn fine coffee' and enjoy the cult TV series-inspired decor.

Cautionary tale: Danes don't do decaf. I assumed decaf coffee would be easy to get in cafés or shops, but it was impossible.

I wish I'd known... A lot of high street shops, even in the city centre, close very early compared to other capital cities. Some were 4pm, others 6pm.

Anything else? Copenhagen is such a friendly city and very walkable with decent trainers!

This month you have been mostly...



Running off mountains in Interlaken – literally. I ran as fast as I could down the grassy slope until the parachute filled with wind and yanked us into the air. My face was stuck in a wide smile from both wind and pleasure. *lw00wl*



Planning the next adventure. Noting down some of your excellent tips for the #Seychelles for my visit next year – thanks!

juliamhammond



Forgetting fears in the high jungles of Belize. I gazed down on an ancient world, seeing lesser temples and unidentified buildings fighting with the trees.

Ebony



In love with Iguazu Falls. Wow, then another wow! So

much better than Niagara Falls.

Janet Babb



Spotting Statue of Liberty replicas in Japan. We found one in Tokyo, hidden away on an island by the docks. *MissRainStorm*



Exploring the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan.

Fabulous, wonderful place. A real Shangri-La. Go now before it modernises. *Alison Telfer*



Finding excitement everywhere. Even London is an adventure! *LizzieAlvey*



Discovering spontaneity in Singapore. This time I had thrown caution to the wind and decided on a more spur-of-the-moment exploration of this enigmatic city. *Garfield*

PHOTO OF THE MONTH

**Stony-eyed on the
Salkantay Trail, Peru**

Michael Molyneux

This Peruvian *arriero* (horseman) was transporting goods and camping gear to villages along the Salkantay Trail near Machu Picchu.

When I took this photo I was looking for a nice spot to camp for the night. There are several designated areas where trekkers can pitch their tents, but I preferred the solitude of the riverside.

The Salkantay Trail is a less-congested alternative to the Inca Trail. But, despite having passed few people, the *arriero* didn't look up as he passed me; he just kept going with a solemn expression as stony as the trail he was riding.



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BACK ON TRACK

It's been 80 years since the completion of Vietnam's north-south railway, but the journey from Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh has become much more than a train ride. Hop aboard the *Reunification Express*

WORDS NICK BOULOS





A bridge to the future
The sun gets ready to
set over the sleepy
waters of Danang



Cramped carriages
The railway tracks pass
right through Hanoi's
busy streets



Checking her watch, Tinh let out the softest of sighs. Almost instinctively, she pushed back on her low stool, its plastic legs scrapping against the tiled floor just as the whole house started to shake. Tinh didn't seem fazed by this. She merely continued to chop vegetables and prod the plump spring rolls that sizzled in a vat of oil beside her as the locomotive came into view; its

red, white and blue carriages passing in a noisy blur almost close enough to touch. Having lived just yards from this line all her life, she's well used to the comings and goings of the *Reunification Express*.

Next year marks the 80th anniversary of the completion of Vietnam's historic north-to-south railway. However, it hasn't been an easy ride since. Conflict in the decades that followed saw it bombed, destroyed and largely abandoned.

Outside Tinh's modest home, the air throbbed as the last carriage swept past on its final approach into Hanoi's central station, marking the very end of its 1,726km journey north from Saigon. It may be one of the world's great rail rides, steeped in history and cutting through some of Asia's most pleasing landscapes, but Tinh didn't entertain any such romantic notions: "It's a hard life living by the railway. I worry about my pet cat. My last one was killed by a train." She glanced towards the black and white feline dozing in a cage nearby.

Phoenix from the ashes

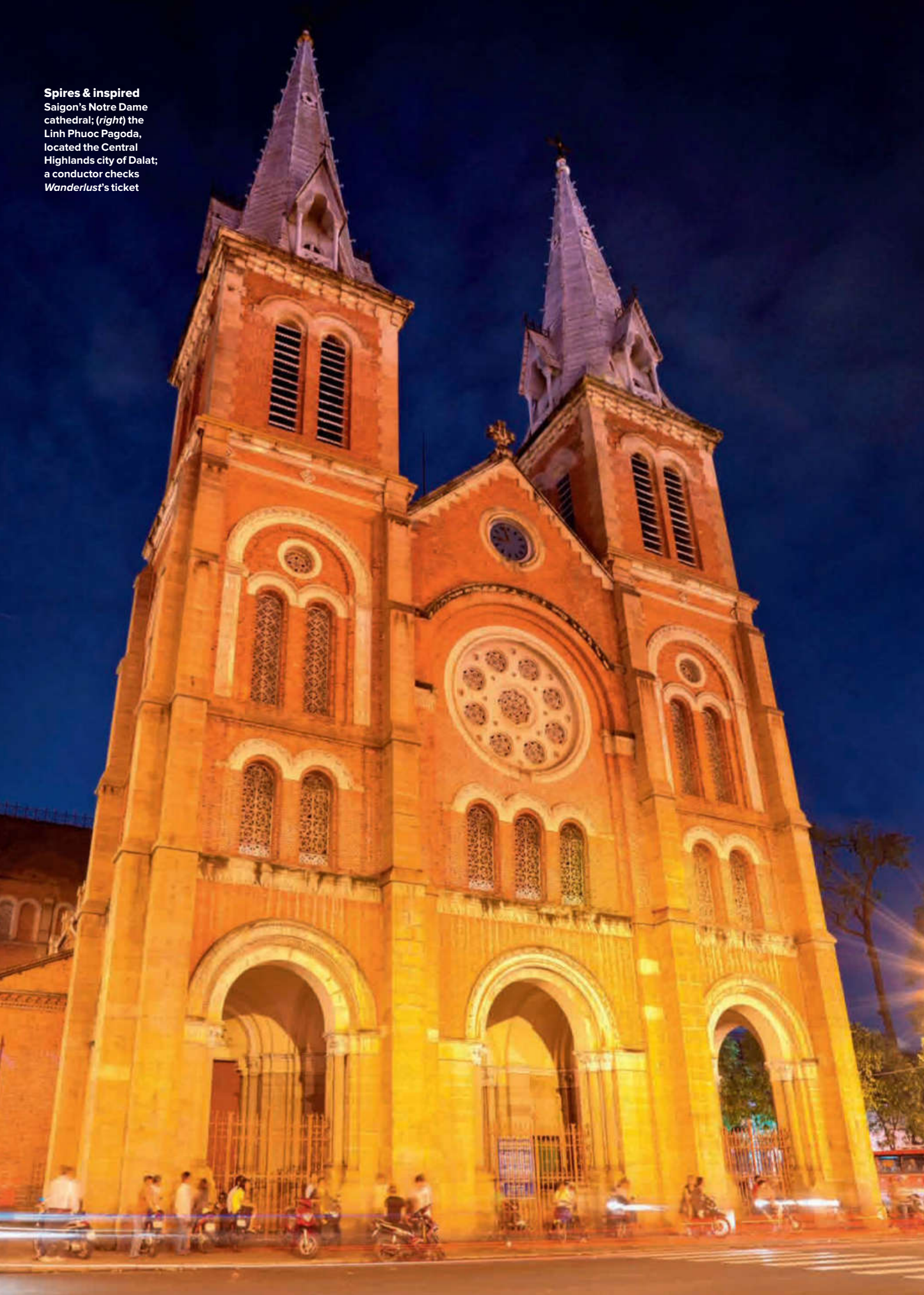
For travellers, the *Reunification Express* is an adventure; for much of the Vietnamese population it symbolises the sacrifices of a nation. Heavily bombed during the Vietnam War, this single track – laid by the French between 1899 and 1936 – became a key target for American planes ►



Make yourself comfy

A picker carries her haul of fruit; (above) fans allow passengers to bear the 37°C heat in the hard-seated second class carriage

Spires & inspired
Saigon's Notre Dame
cathedral; (right) the
Linh Phuoc Pagoda,
located the Central
Highlands city of Dalat;
a conductor checks
Wanderlust's ticket





◀ seeking to disrupt the transportation of weapons and supplies across the country. From 1954 it became impossible to travel from one end to the other as a landmine-dotted demilitarised zone was established near Hue, separating the two territories of North and South Vietnam.

My journey was to take me from south to north, starting in Saigon (now officially Ho Chi Minh City) and ending several days later in the charming capital Hanoi. Once upon a time, this journey would've taken over 60 hours. Today, you can do it in just 36 – but what's the rush?

In a deserted train yard outside Saigon I met Mr Ngoc, a man who's dedicated 55 years of his life to Vietnam's most romantic mode of transport. Mr Ngoc has loved trains since he was a boy growing up in the Central Highlands: "I'd jump on without a ticket and ride them all day until an inspector threw me off." In later life, he was a key player in the rebuilding of the railway system in newly reunified Vietnam.

"Getting the railway working after the war was a big priority for the government and in many ways it was symbolic," he told me as we walked between old steam engines in need of a little TLC. "We faced huge challenges."

The remote, mountainous north presented an obvious set of obstacles but there were problems across the route. Many of the 1,334 bridges and 27 tunnels had to be rebuilt and repaired with little technology and few materials. Despite the setbacks, the newly nicknamed *Reunification Express* made its first post-war journey just 20 months after the final bullet was fired, departing from Hanoi on 31 December 1976.

So long, Saigon

My own rail adventure began with a snooze. The rocking of the train and the sight of Saigon's suburbs swirling beyond the window

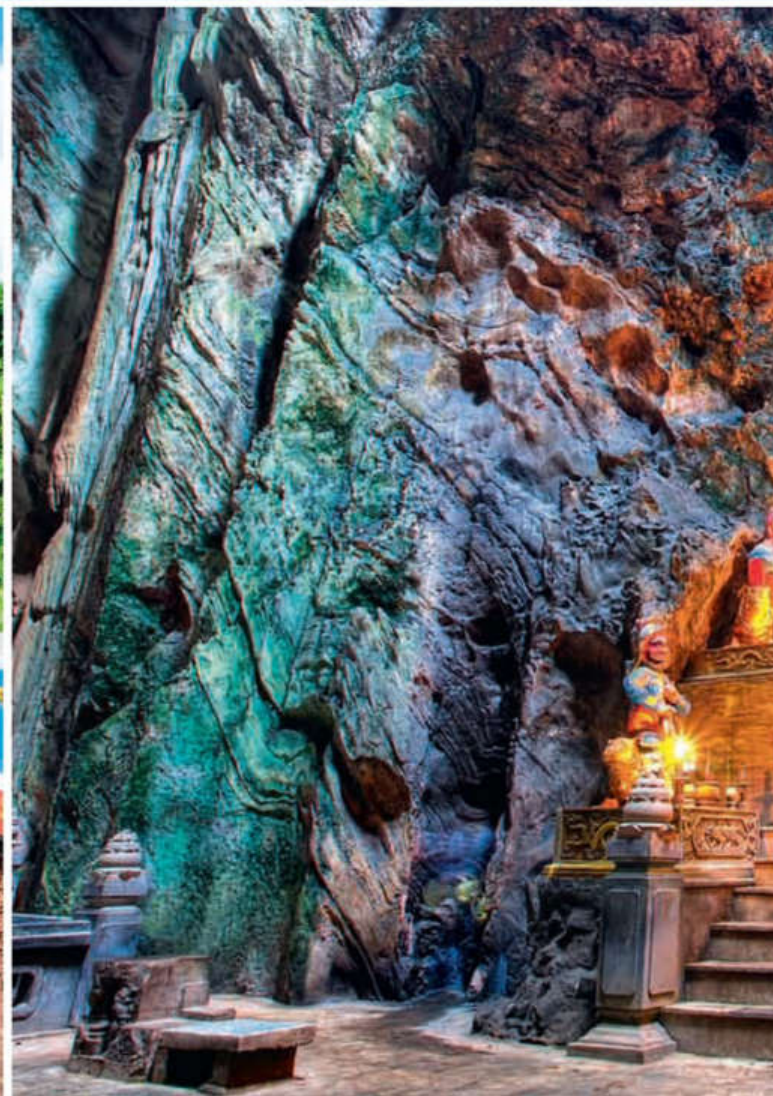
had lured me into slumber. I woke to scenes of peaceful paddy fields bordered by tiny villages and cemeteries with white tombstones barely visible through the tangled vines. Then the views got even better: forested peaks studded with grey boulders, many cracked down the middle like walnuts smashed by giants.

My first stop was Thap Cham. From here, a two and a half hour drive along winding mountain roads transported me to the lakeside retreat of Dalat, where well-heeled French folk set up luxurious holiday homes during the colonial days. Mainline services haven't reached Dalat since 1972, so its small mustard-yellow station with stained glass windows and worn leather armchairs in the waiting room has seen busier days. Now, Platform 1 is permanently occupied by an old Japanese steam engine and a carriage converted into a café, which is hung with black-and-white photographs of the station in its heyday.

Yet this dusty 1930s terminus still welcomes a modest number of passengers keen to ride on the Dalat Plateau Railroad to Trai Mat, just 7km away. Overseeing the second of five departures that day was train conductor of 13 years, Dung. A whistle hung around his neck and he clutched red and yellow flags as train enthusiasts posed for photos beside him.

The toy train eventually materialised: three vintage wooden carriages pulled by a handsome green and yellow diesel locomotive. I boarded, and it lurched into motion, picking up speed as it powered through narrow channels flanked by houses where families ate bowls of *pho* (noodle soup). These gave way to ramshackle farms where large greenhouses nurtured a bounty of flowers and vegetables until, all too soon, it jolted to a halt at Thap Cham, famed for its ornate Chinese pagoda. ▶





**Sea, sleepers
& serenity**

(clockwise from this)

The sea-view at Lang
Co, Danang; the white
Buddha statue at Long
Son pagoda, Nha
Trang; Buddhist
pagoda in Huyen
Khong cave, Danang;
entering the lush
greens of the Highlands



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◀ Sacred tracks

That afternoon, I reverted back to the *Reunification Express* travelling north from Nha Trang to Danang. The 4.29pm service departed on time and by 4.34pm I had become firm friends with the elderly Vietnamese couple sharing my four-bed cabin. Holding hands and wearing matching cotton pyjamas, they were returning home to Hue – the country's ancient capital – having visited family in Saigon. They sat closely together, sharing one of the bottom bunks and later falling asleep in each other's arms just like the old couple in *Titanic*.

For many others, however, the nine-hour journey to Danang didn't pass in quite the same level of comfort. The train's second-class carriages were crammed with weary-looking passengers sitting on uncomfortable wooden seats. With no dining car on board, dinner was fried chicken, boiled cabbage and steamed rice (surprisingly tasty) served by an old lady from a squeaking trolley.

The coastal city of Danang, famed for its beachfront, is not central Vietnam's most alluring address – that honour goes to Hue or Hoi An – but it was the country's most important port in the 19th century. Today, it offers a glimpse of modern Vietnam: high-rise hotels, jet skis

'Large fishing baskets were scattered along Danang's sandy shore, where people were hauling in a large net, revealing dozens of flapping metallic fish with each tug'

and parasailing holidaymakers skimming the sky. But it also remains true to its roots. Watching over the scene from the edge of Monkey Mountain is Lady Buddha. Like an oversized candlestick balancing on the green hillside, she is Vietnam's answer to Christ the Redeemer, a 72m-tall white statue gazing across the peninsula, giving comfort to countless locals who believe she offers protection against typhoons.

Down at sea level, large bamboo fishing baskets were scattered along the wide sandy shore, close to where a dozen people were hauling in a large net. They stood in the murky shallows, heaving with all their might and revealing dozens of flapping metallic fish with each tug.

To the south-west stood the Marble Mountains, five hill-sized limestone formations, each named after a natural element – fire, water, earth, wood and gold – which have been considered sacred for centuries. I climbed the steep stairs on Thuy (Water) Son, the largest of the five, to explore its pagodas and caves, originally used as a place of worship for Hindus before the Buddhists moved in.

Stationed outside the Linh Ong Pagoda, just beyond the bullet-studded Ong Chon gate, was Ta. From beneath her conical *non la* hat, the great grandmother was spending another morning selling incense sticks. I bought some for the princely sum of 20,000 dong (58p) and a large smile spread across her face, revealing a mouthful of inky black teeth. She led me by the hand to pay homage to the Goddess of Mercy.

However, I was more interested to know whether there was a shrine devoted to the patron saint of train travel: I was about to embark on the longest stint of my journey aboard the *Reunification Express* – the 15-hour trip from Danang to Hanoi.

The wrong sort of rain

Arriving at Danang's chaotic station, I'd begun to hope for a little divine intervention as news spread of the train's delay. With every passing minute, the waiting room swelled with more families ►

Catch of the day
The fishers of Danang drag a boat to shore at the end of the day



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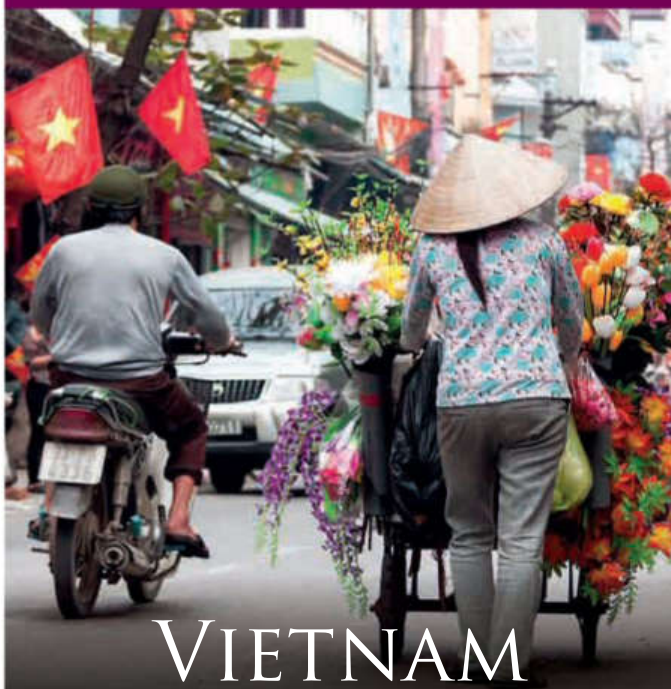
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On your marks...
A line of motorbikes wait for the train to rattle its way through Saigon; (below) incense seller Ta outside Linh Ong Pagoda

‘Bikes, chickens and clanging pots were drowned out by the rumble of a fast-approaching train. Within seconds it was upon us: a thunderous roar, sparks shooting from the wheels’

◀ jostling for seats and backpackers searching for floor space. The platform was less crowded, so I waited there among the shopkeepers and their tiny stalls. They busied themselves restocking all manner of essentials for the journey ahead: dried fish, boiled eggs, tea towels and commemorative plates featuring the face of Ho Chi Minh.

When the train eventually arrived, people spilled out of the waiting room like an army of ants, scurrying to their luggage-laden carriages. I settled into my cabin, peeled back the faded pink curtains, moved the fake flowers out of the way and, under strict orders from Mr Ngoc, paid close attention to one of the railway's most spectacular sections. Stretching for 21km towards Hue, the Hai Van (Sea Cloud) Pass rises to an elevation of almost 500m, slicing through the Truong Son Mountains, a rugged range that separates the Mekong Basin from the South China Sea. Long stretches of beaches and rocky promontories appeared below while the 21st-century skyline of Danang sat on the horizon. Rain lashed against the windowpane, each heavy droplet causing a large splutter that gave the whole scene a celestial beauty.

A toast to trains

The drizzle continued to fall long after the train arrived into Hanoi. Low clouds hung over the Old Quarter; the downpour settled

on the arched scarlet bridge in the middle of Hoan Kiem Lake and slid down the yellow walls of the Opera House.

As night fell, I retreated to Ray Quan, a tiny bar and restaurant with a wine list lifted straight from a Grimm's fairytale (think rice wine flavoured with starfish, river geckos and silkworms). Like Tinh's house, the bar is located just yards from the train tracks, near a busy crossing with an endless stream of honking mopeds. Across the tracks was the back of a noodle restaurant, where live chickens clucked loudly until falling abruptly silent at the hands of the streetside chefs.

However, the bikes, chickens and clanging pots and pans were soon drowned out by the rumble of a fast-approaching train. Within seconds it was upon us: a thunderous roar, with sparks shooting from the screeching wheels and an amber glow seeping from the sleeping compartments.

As is customary whenever a train rumbles past Ray Quan, I reached for one of the thimble-sized ceramic cups filled with rice wine and raised my glass, to toast the adventure, the ingenuity and the dogged determination of the *Reunification Express*. 🍷



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Vietnam Footnotes

VITAL STATISTICS

Capital: Hanoi
Population: 94 million
Languages: Vietnamese; English (increasingly spoken); some French
Time: GMT+7
International dialling code: +84
Visas: Not required by UK nationals for stays of less than 15 days
Money: Vietnamese dong (VND), currently around VND33,400 to the UK£. US dollars are widely accepted. ATMs are available in larger towns.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

■ Cold in the north; largely dry.
 ■ Considered the best time to visit; beginning of the wet season in the south.
 ■ Hot, humid and wet; risk of typhoons along the coast.

Health & safety

No vaccinations are required. Malaria and dengue fever are present in some areas, including the southern provinces and the Mekong Delta.

Vietnam is largely safe but guard against pickpocketing and petty crime. Roads are busy and chaotic – exercise caution when crossing; accidents are common.

Further reading & information

Vietnam (Rough Guide, 2015)
Vietnam (Lonely Planet, 2014)
seat61.com An indispensable resource for rail travel.
vietnamtourism.com



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- ◆ Exploring Vietnam's caves – issue 154
- ◆ Ten Things To Do In Saigon (HCMC) – online exclusive
- ◆ Finding paradise islands – issue 146

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- ◆ Vietnam travel guide

THE TRIP

i The author travelled with **On The Go Tours** (0207 371 1113, www.onthegotours.com). A seven day itinerary, travelling onboard the *Reunification Express* from Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) to Hanoi, costs from £917pp based on two people travelling. Price includes accommodation, ground transportation, guide, breakfast; excludes international flights and some entrance fees.



Getting there

Vietnam Airlines (vietnamairlines.com) offers the only direct UK-Vietnam flights. It flies five times a week to Hanoi and Saigon from London Heathrow. Return fares from £400; journey time is around 11.5 hours. **Qatar Airways** (qatarairways.com), flies via London Heathrow, Manchester and Edinburgh to Ho Chi Minh and Hanoi via Doha.



Getting around

Vietnam has a good-value domestic flight network. As well as the national carrier, other options include **VietJet** (vietjetair.com), **Vasco** (vasco.com.vn) and **Jetstar** (jetstar.com). Avoid road travel – distances are long and accidents common.



Reunification Express

There is no one *Reunification Express*; the name applies to all the national services operated by Vietnam Railways (vr.com.vn; in Vietnamese) that connect Hanoi with Saigon.

Trains are regular and punctual. Most trains have four classes: hard seat, soft seat, hard sleeper and soft sleeper. Given the lengthy journeys and cheap cost, opt for the soft sleeper. Bottom bunks tend to be cheaper than top bunks. Expect to pay around VND1,077,000 (£31) for a one-way ticket from Danang to Hanoi. Reservations are essential – book at travel agencies in major cities or at stations in advance.

Pack a fleece (the air con is often cranked up), a pair of slippers (for nighttime toilet stops), tissues and earplugs. Also take a **stash of snacks** – sharing is a great way to break the ice with fellow passengers.



Accommodation

Hotels are both **cheap and cheerful**. Choices include **Sunway** (sunwayhotelhanoi.com) in Hanoi; **A La Carte** (alacarteliving.com) in Danang; **Ngoc Lan** (ngoclanhotel.vn) in Dalat; **Northern** (northernhotel.com.vn) in Saigon.



Cost of travel

Vietnam's **kind on the wallet**. Expect to pay between VND30,000–65,000 (90p–£1.95) for a beer; around VND7,000 (20p) for a bottle of water; a meal can cost as little as VND29,000 (85p).

RIDING THE REUNIFICATION EXPRESS



1 Hanoi

Wander through the capital's charming Old Quarter, admire the temples and willow trees at Hoan Kiem Lake, and pay your respects at Ho Chi Minh's mausoleum.

2 Lao Cai

Home to one of the first stretches of track to be laid by the French, this mountainous town on the Chinese border is the gateway to the tribes and terraced hillsides of Sapa.

3 Hue

Located on the banks of the Perfume River, Vietnam's former capital still commands respect with its ancient tombs, temples and citadels.

4 Danang

Famed for its bays and Marble Mountains, the country's third-largest and most rapidly changing city is also close to the atmospheric and unmissable town of Hoi An.

5 Nha Trang

Catch some rays on the soft sand at Vietnam's premier beach resort, a haven for divers and sailors.

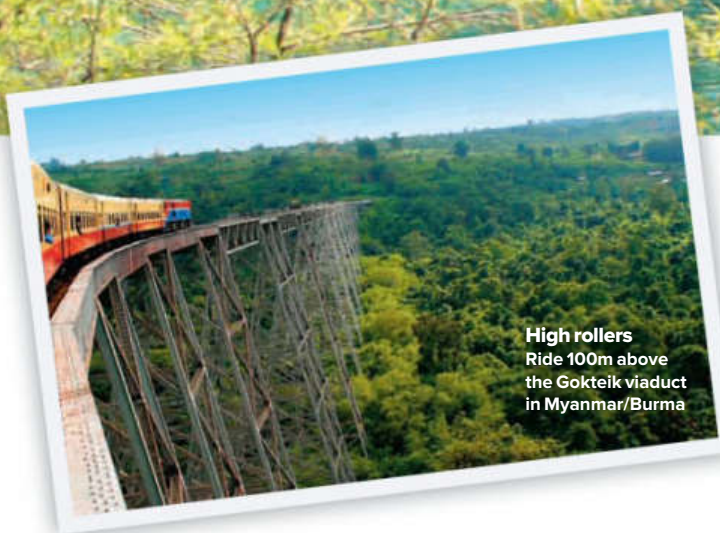
6 Saigon

Now officially known as **Ho Chi Minh City**, Saigon is rich in wartime history. Don't miss the War Remnants Museum and a crawl through the network of narrow underground tunnels at Cu Chi.



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High rollers
Ride 100m above the Gokteik viaduct in Myanmar/Burma

1 MANDALAY TO LASHIO Central Burma

LENGTH: 280km; 15.5hrs **USP:** Inches along the precarious Gokteik Viaduct

♦ Burma isn't big on railways, but this one's a gem. Leaving Mandalay at 4am, the rickety old loco crosses the plains in the darkness, stopping at the odd fire-flickering wayside station. It hits the mountains at dawn, and winds up through to the hill station of Pyin Oo Lwin as day breaks. Then, after a stretch of scenic countryside, the Gokteik Viaduct comes into view: a 689m railway trestle with 15 towers, raised 102m above the river, built by the Americans in 1901. As the

train inches across at a snail's pace, arcophobes should not look down. Picking up a little speed, the train then scoots off to Lashio, via the Shan town of Hsipaw (worth a stop for its lively, non-touristy market, where minority peoples come to shop), jungly landscapes, neat fields and a tickertape of a rural Burmese life.

ALSO TRY: The Circle Train, Yangon – Ride Yangon's leisurely commuter loop to see the city neighbourhoods glide by.

2 YATSUSHIRO TO HAYATO Kyushu, Japan

LENGTH: 124km; around 3hrs

USP: One of Japan's three most scenic rides – officially

♦ Yes, there are faster trains in Japan. But that's the beauty of Kyushu's meandering Hisatsu Line: while all those *shinkansen* are dashing about, this route is content to dither. It links Yatsushiro to Hayato via the Kirishima Mountains. The Hisatsu's first section, from Yatsushiro to Hitoyoshi, follows the Kumagawa River. The second ploughs onwards to Yoshimatsu, and is officially considered one the three most scenic train trips in Japan, climbing switchbacks, gazing down into valleys and flirting with the smoking summit of Mount Sakurajima. At Yoshimatsu you need to change again for the final trundle into Hayato.

ALSO TRY: The Seto-Ohashi line, linking the prefectures of Okayama (Honshu) and Kagawa (Shikoku), via the 13km-long Great Seto Bridge.

3 URUMQI TO KASHGAR Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, China

LENGTH: 1,588km; 25-30hrs

USP: A Silk Road strand with a Central Asian atmosphere

♦ This train in the country's far, wild west, perhaps feels the least Chinese. It cuts through Muslim Uyghur country, a landscape of untamed dusty plains and deserts, wandering nomads (with distinctly Central Asian features), herds of camels, views to the snow-capped Tian Shan Mountains and Turpan's flaming sandstone cliffs, soaring minarets and a back-in-time feel. It's a great way to get to Kashgar, that most Silk Road of cities; time your visit to arrive on Sunday, to coincide with the noisy, exotic, spicy, fragrant bazaar.

ALSO TRY: The Hunan-Guangxi Railway – a spectacular wiggle through southern China's karst hills and paddy fields, especially the 6-8hr section from Nanning to Guilin.

Fine lines
The Hisatsu lines express train winds through scenic Japan; (below) the Toy Train moves along the track on its way to the hill station of Darjeeling



4 SINGAPORE TO BANGKOK

Singapore, Malaysia & Thailand

LENGTH: 1,985km; 48hrs

USP: Three countries, two days

♦ The big of budget can do this trip aboard the plush carriages of the *Eastern & Oriental Express* to travel between Singapore and Bangkok. Those of humbler means can take the regular trains, crossing the 1920s causeway over the Johor Strait, waving goodbye to the high-rises of Singapore and traversing Malaysia via palm plantations to the glitz of Kuala Lumpur; then catch the train north to lively mountain-nestled Ipoh and Butterworth (for Penang). Then you border-cross into Thailand, to chug up past jungles, waterfalls and lively market towns to the Thai capital.

ALSO TRY: The Jungle Line (East Coast Line), Malaysia – this forks east from Gemas (before Kuala Lumpur), cutting through the rainforested interior to meet the coast at Kota Bharu.

5 BEIJING TO PYONGYANG

China & North Korea

LENGTH: 1,364km; 23hrs

USP: The most illuminating way into/out of the secretive nation

♦ Yes, it can take an eternity, being frequently delayed by snow, power cuts and customs officials, but the train into or out of the notoriously closed-off North Korea offers a rare glimpse at life above the 38th Parallel. The train runs four times a week, crossing the Sino-Korea Friendship Bridge from Dandong (China) to Sinuiju (North Korea). From the windows you can look out on the villages, mountains and dilapidated stations bearing pictures of the Dear and Great Leaders. You'll need to be on an organised tour, with documents in order, but this is about as independent as North Korean travel gets.

ALSO TRY: The Pyongyang Metro – mix with everyday North Koreans on the capital's ornate underground, complete with colourful frescos and bling chandeliers.

6 COLOMBO TO BADULLA

Sri Lanka

LENGTH: 292km; 10hrs

USP: Slices through the tea country

♦ The railway plunging inland from Sri Lanka's west-coast capital to the highland city of Badulla negotiates 44 tunnels, passes 81 stations and at least ten major waterfalls. Bag a seat on the right-hand side and watch as Colombo's outskirts gradually melt into a vast birdlife-rich marshland. The train is at its most cliff-teeteringly perilous at Balana, where the tracks cut into steep slopes, before continuing to climb to Nanu Oya and passing the pilgrimage summit of Adam's Peak. Soon high peaks are swapped for the greens of tea county; after Pattipola – at 1,890m, the railway's highest point – the tracks traverse Horton Plains and descend towards Ella, before halting at Badulla.

ALSO TRY: *The Queen of Jaffna* – between Colombo and Jaffna, via UNESCO-listed Anuradhapura.


7 MADGAON TO MUMBAI

Goa & Maharashtra, India

LENGTH: 580km; 12.5 hours

USP: A masterstroke of engineering, showcasing local life

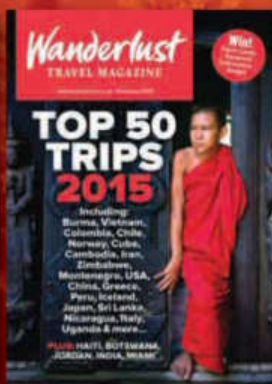
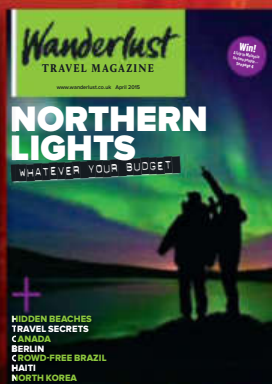
♦ The Konkan Railway, which runs for 741km from Mumbai to Mangalore (Karnataka) traverses an impressive gauntlet of rivers, valleys, mountains and coastal plains, crossing 2,000 bridges and squeezes through 92 tunnels: this means the *Mandovi Express*, which runs along the Konkan line from the Goan city of Madgaon to Mumbai, is one of India's most spectacular rides, as it cuts up between the Arabian Sea and the Sahyadri Hills; en route, watch a colourful carousel of coconut palms, paddy fields, mango trees and tiny villages roll by.

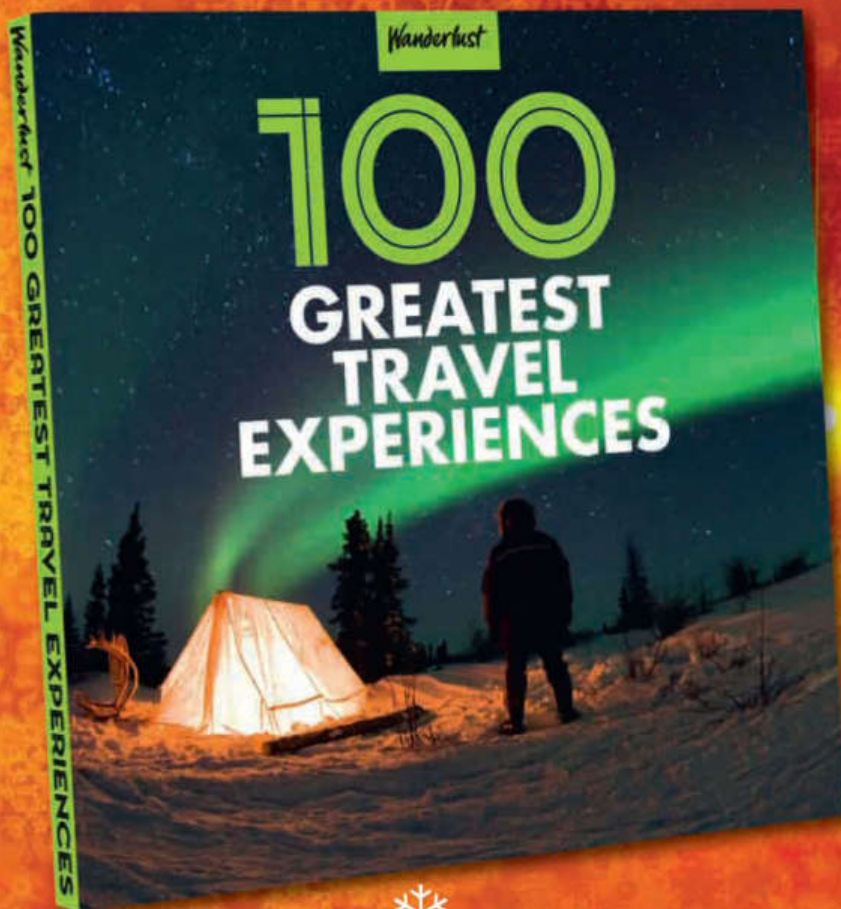
ALSO TRY: *The Toy Train* – take the narrow-gauge steam train from New Jalpaiguri to the West Bengal hill station of Darjeeling, a historic (if slow) ride via tea plantations, forests and Himalaya views. 

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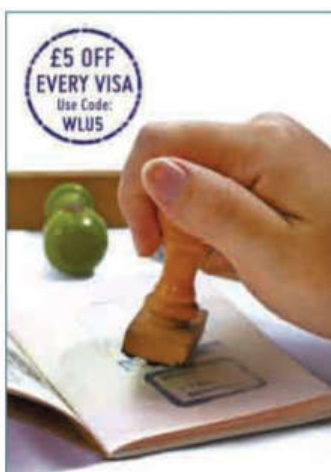


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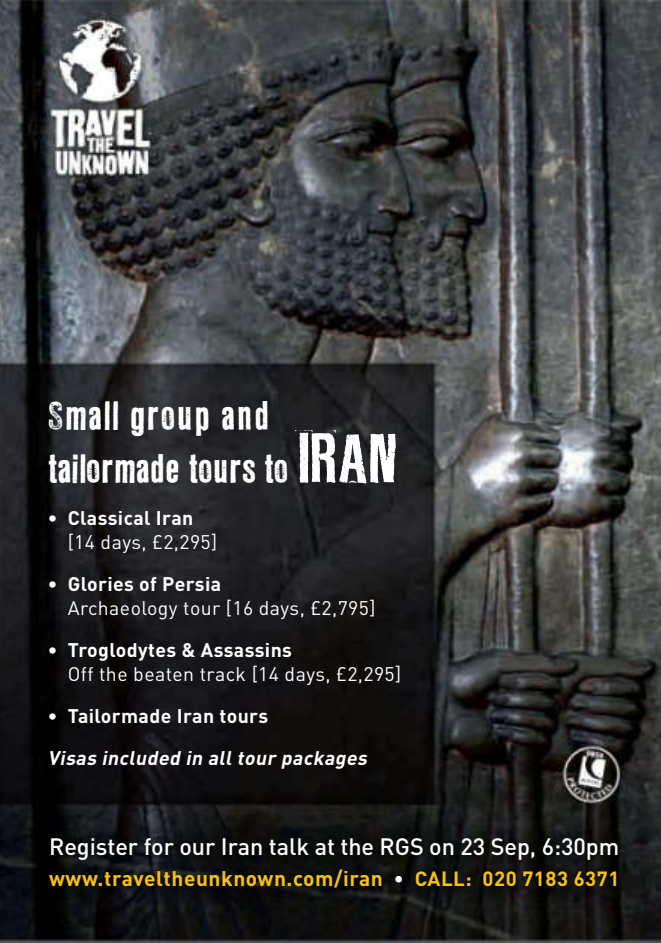
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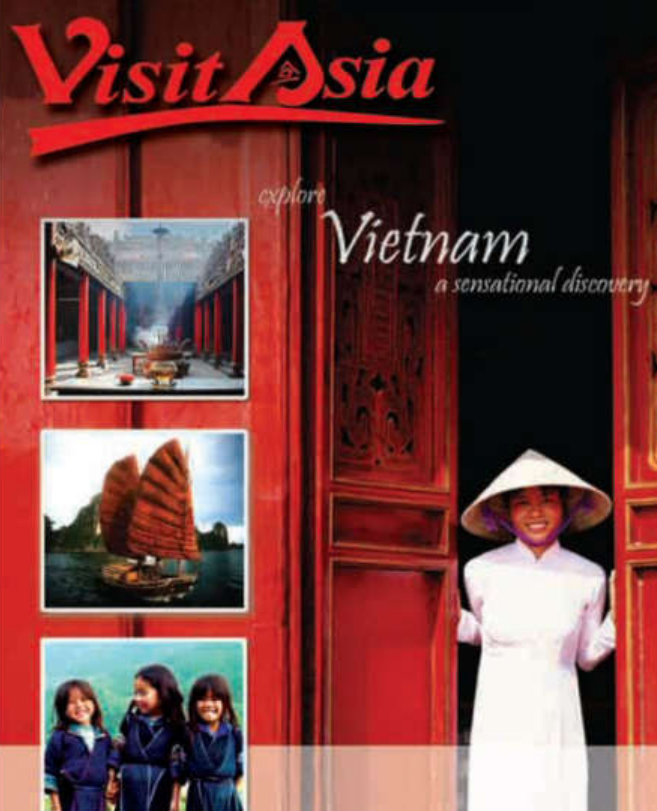
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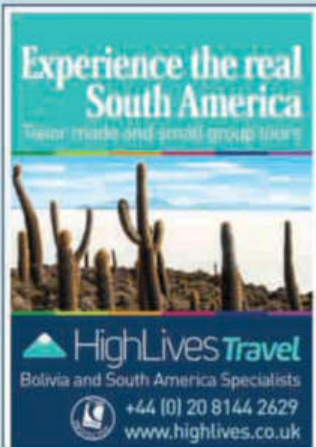
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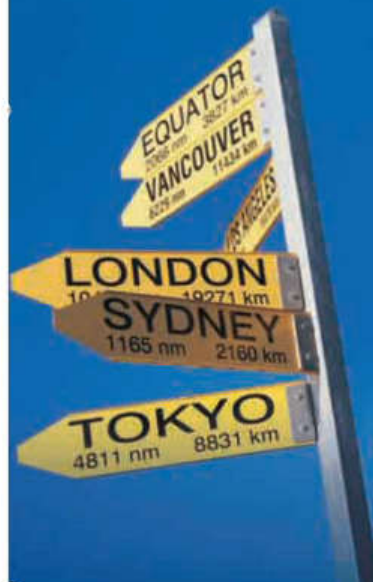
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How I got into Travel



Caroline Maber

Travel Consultant, Tailor-Made Holidays, Journey Latin America
(journeylatinamerica.co.uk)

Adrenaline junkie Caroline loves Latin America

How long have you worked for Journey Latin America? 15 years.
What did you do before and what attracted you to the job?

I was at university, travelling and working part-time jobs. I spent a year living in Chile, had a passion for the continent and had bought flights with Journey Latin America. I thought it was the perfect starting place to work and 15 years on I'm still here.

What is it like to work for Journey Latin America? There are lots of like-minded people. There are challenging moments but sending people on a trip of a lifetime makes it so enjoyable.

What do you like about your role? Speaking to people about places I've been, experienced and loved. Also, as an adrenaline junkie I'm always happy to test out various adventure sports in Latin America!

What challenges have you faced? At times we come across challenging clients. Also re-arranging itineraries at very short notice when there's a strike, a volcano erupts or a flight is cancelled.

How has your career progressed at Journey Latin America? I've worked in our product and flights department and am now putting together tailor-made itineraries.

Tell us about your favourite moments so far. A client telling you that everything went perfectly is always a highlight. Other fond memories include zip-lining in Mexico and horseriding in Argentina.



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- Management of small events
- Budget management
- Project and logistics planning
- Liaising with suppliers and clients
- Processing payments/invoicing
- Production of briefing presentations and material

- Creating promotional materials such as email shots
- Production of itineraries

Who we are looking for:

- Travel professional with operations experience
- Good communicator with solid presentation and written skills
- Highly organised, able to follow process with meticulous attention to detail
- Ability to anticipate needs, be proactive and take ownership of role
- Well travelled with good knowledge of relevant destinations, local operations and airlines
- Ability to use initiative and work effectively both individually and as part of a team
- Educated to degree level
- Understanding of Microsoft office and experience with a Content Management System a plus
- Web marketing experience a plus
- Fluency in English required, second language a plus

If this sounds like you please send your CV, cover letter and salary requirements to rebecca@jonbainestours.co.uk

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Travel Company Tales



Steppes Travel

Nick Laing

Chairman of the tailor-made travel tour operator on 25 years in the trade and continuing to offer a personalised service

How did Steppes Travel start?

In 1989, sitting on a bench in the foothills of the Altai mountains in Russia, I sat looking at some of the most beautiful scenery I had seen anywhere in the world. Then I realised there were people out there who would also like to visit these remote areas of the world – people who didn't have the time or knowledge to organise it themselves; people who appreciated their comforts, but would forsake it all to visit some remote hut in the mountains because it was worth the adventure. And so Steppes was born.

Early challenges?

Starting a travel company concentrating on Russia in 1989 posed a few problems – there was no internet and just 36 international telephone lines here. If we needed to speak to someone in Russia we could sit for an hour dialling the same number before we got through.

There were no switchboards either! But researching new locations in Russia was even more entertaining: in 1990 we were invited to look at possible camp sites for fishing in Kamchatka which, in Soviet times, had been a completely closed zone, even to Russians.

What makes Steppes Travel unique?

Our specialists have an expertise that is second to none. They have a wealth of experience and revisit their areas of expertise yearly to refresh their minds and discover new opportunities. They tell you about the friendly hotels and charismatic guides, – those qualities that make your trip unique and special. Anyone with knowledge of



a specific country can set up a travel company. It's how you react when things go wrong that sorts the men from the boys. The very nature of the places we visit occasionally result in problems but sorting these issues quickly and efficiently has always been our aim.

Future plans?

To remain a private company, not constrained by what or how we sell. This allows us to deliver a highly personal level of service that understands the way our clients like to travel. Above all, it gives us superb buying skills and agent loyalty, often resulting in room upgrades and highly competitive prices for the type of travel we offer.

www.steppestravel.co.uk



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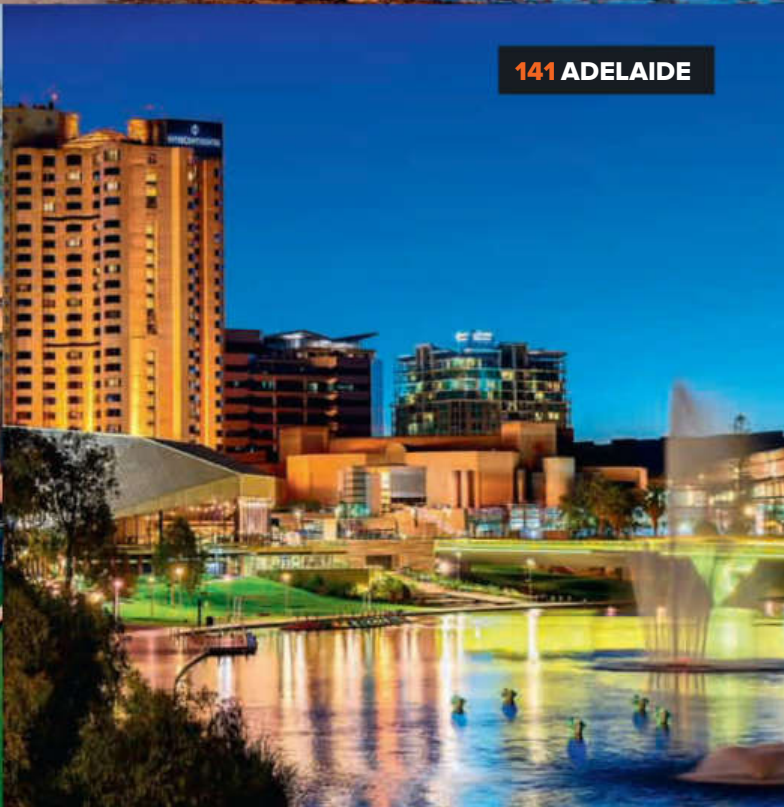
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Geysir, Iceland

Volatile Iceland gave us the word 'geyser' and is home to many a geothermal feature. This October, new BA flights make those super spurts easier to see

Get orientated

At Haukadalur, a small geothermal area located in a valley in Iceland's south-west, there is a particular intermittent jet of steaming water that has lent its name to every single other one found since: Geysir. The so-called Great Geysir and its volatile surrounds was the first phenomenon of its type to be recorded, back in the 13th century; the name, which appeared from the 18th century, comes from the old Norse word *geysa* – 'to gush'.

Ironically, the original geyser is rather ungushy these days. At its peak, it blew multiple times a day and regularly reached heights of 60-80m, sometimes up to 170m. Now it erupts only on rare occasions. However, Iceland, sitting on top of one of the planet's major fault lines, is a hotbed of geothermal activity, and Haukadalur is home to plenty of other, more reliable hot springs that still put on a fantastic show.

Getting there & around

On 25 October, British Airways (ba.com) is launching thrice-weekly flights from Heathrow to Reykjavik (from £78 return; flight time is three hours). Several other airlines fly to the Icelandic capital, including Icelandair (icelandair.co.uk), which flies from Heathrow, Gatwick, Birmingham and Glasgow.

The Geysir Geothermal Field at Haukadalur is one of the trio of classic sites (along with Thingvellir National Park and Gullfoss Waterfall) known as the Golden Circle, forming a 300km loop from Reykjavik. Numerous companies offer the circle as a day trip; expect to pay from around 10,000 kroner (£48). Alternatively, hire a car and take in the sites at your own pace.

The visit

The Geysir Center, across the road from the Haukadalur thermal area, has a cafe, shop

and museum for visitors to nose around. Entrance to the geyser site is free.

Marked pathways thread between the sulphur-pungent thermal features. Stokkur ('The Churn') is the most active of the geysers, spouting every eight to ten minutes, usually rising 15-20m – some spurts are more spectacular than others so stay to watch at least a couple of eruptions. Other bubbling attractions include the boiling azure-blue pool of Blesi, hissing Little Geysir, Konungshver ('king's hot spring') and numerous other vents, streams, mud pots and strange plants. Get an overview of the site by taking the easy trail up nearby Laugafell Mountain. And do visit the calm pool of Geysir itself – you never know when it might spring back into action...

The great waterfall of Gullfoss ('Golden Falls'), where the Hvítá River crashes 32m down into a narrow canyon, is 10km east of Geysir. ►



Spouting off Here's how a geyser works...

◆ Life span

The force and life span of a geyser depend on the amount of water that flows into it.

◆ Funnel

The water access channel expands to a funnel at the surface.

◆ Water access channel

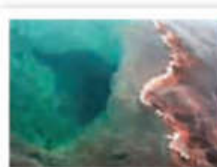
After the eruption, water flows back into the ground and, together with underground water, refills the shaft within a few minutes.

◆ Water column

In 1880 the chemist Robert Wilhelm Bunsen of Göttingen, Germany, developed a theory on the functioning of geysers; its basics are still considered to be valid today. Geysers are part of an underground water system that runs to great depths. There is a deep shaft under the surface opening that contains a column of water that is heated by the earth's warmth. Because of the pressure of the water column, the boiling point is much higher than 100°C. The decisive factor in the creation of a geyser is that the water is heated up to much more than 100°C but cannot boil because of the pressure deep in the earth.

◆ Vaporisation

When the pressure becomes too great, steam rises abruptly to the surface; as the steam expands, it pushes the water above it, causing an explosive vaporisation. This is the driving force behind the rising water column.



◆ At rest

Strokkur's turquoise waters take a break between eruptions.



◆ Eruption

The explosion-like expansion of steam pushes the water column above it out of the ground.



◆ Water bell

The first signs of an impending eruption are pulses of the relatively cool water at the top of the shaft, which is forced out first.



◆ Steam

When the pressure is released, the water temperature is above boiling point and the overheated water becomes steam.



■ Essentials

Language: Icelandic

Time: GMT

Visas: Not required by UK nationals

Money: Icelandic krona (ISK), currently ISK210 to the UK£

Health: Be prepared for changeable weather.



This feature is adapted from Marco Polo's *Travel Handbook: Iceland*, which contains infographics, insider tips, tour suggestions and a large pull-out map. See marco-polo.com

Super setting
Elegant Geneva clusters
around a lake, nestled
amid the Alps



Geneva, Switzerland

Geneva is a money destination in more than one sense. **Thomas Rees** visits the explorable 'small big city' for helpings of history, science and amazing fondue

French-speaking Geneva is a city with a paradox at its heart. It's an international centre for diplomacy – home to the UN, the Red Cross and countless other NGOs. It's also here that legions of high-powered bankers grease the wheels of finance and CERN scientists play with 'God particles' and billion dollar machinery, blasting beams of protons around the Large Hadron Collider. Genevans are either leading the world or saving it, and with that kind of responsibility the streets ought to be a seething tide of cortisol. Yet the overriding impression is one of complete serenity, of a global city with the laidback feel of a small town, where there's always time for a lazy lakeside stroll.

Just as perplexing is why more people don't linger. So many of Geneva's visitors are just passing through; indeed, as the alpine ski season approaches, they'll be doing just that in

their thousands, bound for the slopes. But Geneva is ideal for a short break.

The city is draped around the south-west shore of Lac Léman – also known as Lake Geneva, Europe's largest Alpine lake. When the sun shines it stipples the water with silver, highlights the funnels of the *belle époque* paddle steamers and catches the spray of the Jet d'Eau, Geneva's iconic fountain, which spurts a plume of water 140m high. The city is also divided by the River Rhône and flanked by the Alps – on a clear day you can see Mont Blanc shimmering on the skyline. All in all, it's an arrestingly beautiful setting.

With its tranquil parks, treelined boulevards and colonnaded public buildings, Geneva's aesthetic is elegant and understated. A host of museums and galleries (many of them free) bolster its cultural credentials. There are colourful festivals too: the Fêtes de Genève street party is held in summer, while December brings the Fête de

l'Escalade, when torchlit processions commemorate the successful defence of the city against the Duke of Savoy in 1602.

Geneva's historic heart, and the site of that defence, is the Old Town, on the Rive Gauche (Left Bank). Now a knot of winding streets centred around the Gothic Cathédrale Saint-Pierre, this was once an Allobrogian frontier post, conquered by the Romans in 121 BC. In the 16th century, under the spiritual leadership of John Calvin, the city was an important centre during the Reformation. Protestants from across Europe arrived here in their droves, bringing with them many of the crafts for which Geneva remains famous. Chief among them is watchmaking, and the city has countless boutiques with ogle-worthy window displays of luxury timepieces. Browse them all, wander the Left Bank, explore the Right and cap it all off with an indulgent fondue. Just don't rush – it's very un-Genevan. ►

◀ HERE'S THE PLAN...

■ Essential Info

When to go: Year-round. The city is charming in autumn and winter, with festivals and fondue to ameliorate the cold. The waterfront and the lake get busier in spring. Summer is best for picnics in the city's parks and swimming in the lake.

Getting there: EasyJet (www.easyjet.com) flies direct to Geneva from most UK airports from £22 each way. Flight time is around 1.5 hours.

Getting around: You can walk to most places in central Geneva. For longer journeys the city's trolleybuses and trams are excellent. There are ticket machines at every stop.

Where to stay: Hôtel Les Armures (hotel-les-armures.ch) is a charming 17th-century five-star spot in the centre of the old town; doubles from 345 CHF (£225). Hotel Edelweiss in Paquis (hotelledelweissgeneva.com) is done out like a chalet, a cosy winter option; doubles from 220 CHF (£146). The two-star Hôtel Bel'Esperance (hotel-bel-esperance.ch), located at

the gates of the old town, is excellent value; doubles from 170 CHF (£113). **Where to eat:** See days one and two. Ou Bien Encore (61, Rue Des Bains) has a wide range of vegan and gluten-free options. If you're serious about your coffee try Birdie Coffee (birdiecoffee.com), a few doors down. **More info:** geneve-tourisme.ch



TOP TIP

Get a free travel card (valid for 80mins of public transport) from machines by baggage reclaim at the airport. Also, all overnighting visitors can get a free travel card that covers all public transport during your stay.

Day 1: HISTORY & HOROLOGY

Start in the Old Town at the **Place du Bourg-de-Four** (once a Roman forum). Rue de l'Hotel-de-Ville takes you past the 15th century **Town Hall** where the Red Cross was founded. The museum at nearby **Maison Tavel** (free; Rue du Puits-St-Pierre 6), within Geneva's oldest residence, provides an overview of the city's history.

Next stop, **Cathédrale Saint-Pierre** (free; saintpierre-geneve.ch) where John Calvin once preached. Visit the Chapel of the Maccabees, and pay to climb the towers for good views (5 CHF [£3]). An archaeological site in the basement (8 CHF [£5]; site-archeologique.ch) houses an Allobrogian chieftain's tomb.

At Grand Rue 40 you'll find the house where philosopher **Jean-Jacques Rousseau** (*statue pictured*) was born. Continue down the hill, passing ornately carved doors, to **Place de Bel-Air** and the waterfront. Window shop for



luxury timepieces along **Rue du Rhône**, then head south for an insight into the history of watchmaking at the **Patek Philippe Museum** (10 CHF [£6.50]; www.patekmuseum.com). Then stroll through nearby **Parc de Bastions**, with its imposing Reformation Wall.

Finish with a tasty steak and chips at **Le Relais d'Entrecôte** (relaisentrecote.fr) or with drinks at **La Buvette de Bateau** (Apr-Sept only; bateaugeneve.ch), a bar on a belle époque steamer moored near the Jet d'Eau.



Day 2: PALACES & PARKS

Time to see the Right Bank. Cross the Rhône via the **Pont des Bergues** (there's a statue of Rousseau on the island in the middle). Head for the train station, Gare Cornavin, and catch a bus to the **Place des Nations** (stop: Nations). At the end of an avenue of flags is the **Palais des Nations** (unog.ch), formerly the headquarters of the League of Nations and now home to the UN. The visitors' entrance is further up Avenue de la Paix. Visits are by tour only (12 CHF [£8]; 1 hour; ID required). Among the highlights are the Art Deco corridors of the old wing and the Council Chamber with its green

and gold frescoes. Over the road, the **Musée International de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge** (redcrossmuseum.ch) provides an insight into the activities of Geneva's most famous NGO.

Walk back into town via the **Botanic Gardens** and **Parc de la Perle du Lac**. When it's clear you can see Mont Blanc from the waterfront. Finish with an invigorating dip in the lake or a sauna at the **Bains de Paquis** (bains-des-paquis.ch); the *fondue au crémant* (made with sparkling wine) at the on-site cafeteria-style **Buvette des Bains** (buvettesdesbains.ch) is legendary.

Day 3: ART, ATOMS & ALPS

There's plenty more to see in central Geneva, including the excellent **Museum of Ethnography** (free; ville-ge.ch/meg) and the **Musée d'art et d'histoire** (free; ville-ge.ch/mah).

If you're in the mood for something more cutting edge, take Tram 18 from Gare Cornavin to **CERN** (free; cern.ch; bring ID), where exhibitions and guided tours (online reservations essential) unravel the mysteries of the Large Hadron Collider.

From there, take Tram 18 back through central Geneva to the opposite end of the line and spend the afternoon in **Carouge**, a historic municipality with a Mediterranean

feel, built from 1786 by Victor Amadeus III, King of Sardinia and Duke of Savoy. Today it's a confection of boutiques, artisans workshops and cafés.

Alternatively, take a trip along the lake. **Paddle steamers** run from Pâquis and the Jardin Anglais to the picturesque medieval town of **Yvoire** on the French side until mid-October (48CHF [£32] return; cgn.ch; 105 mins).

For mountain scenery, lakeside walks and to visit the nearby **Château de Chillon** (chillon.ch) – beloved by Lord Byron – take a train from Gare Cornavin to Montreux (CHF30 [£20]; 1hr). The town hosts a **famous jazz festival** in July. 🎷



Good living
Adelaide was recently ranked as the fifth-most liveable city in the world



Adelaide, Australia

Graceful and conservative, yet also bright, brash, multicultural and forward-looking, the South Australian capital is enjoying a renaissance, discovers **Martin Symington**

i Before you arrive

Sydneysiders and Melburnians sometimes disparage Adelaide for lacking panache. South Australia's capital, they suggest, has a whiff of colonial-era formality – a throw-back to bygone times. For sure, there's a tidy elegance about the tree-lined boulevards and airy Victorian-era parks, laid out after the city was founded in 1836 as a 'Free Colony', meaning without the taint of convict settlers. But things have long moved on.

First, immigration has bathed the flavours of Adelaide – and not just its restaurants – in a multi-ethnic vitality. Secondly, the cultured airs that inspired the annual Adelaide Festival of Arts (March), has sparked a parallel Fringe festival (from mid-Feb) and a year-round art and music scene that cuts through the old-school stuffiness.

Adelaide's traditional and countercultural faces share a feeling of affluence in their enviable location, cupped beneath the Adelaide Hills. The western

suburbs fringe the sea with the beaches of Glenelg offering all the fizz of Sydney's Bondi and more.

Tennis star Lleyton Hewitt is an Adelaidian, while Rupert Murdoch's first newspapers were based here, reflecting the city's contrasting new brashness and steely conservatism. Then there's cricketer Sir Don Bradman, who made his home here; and Don Dunstan, the former State Premier who used to wear pink shorts in South Australia's parliament. Imagine this quartet glugging a local Barossa Valley shiraz on a parkland picnic and you have Adelaide's incongruities in a nutshell.



At the airport

Adelaide Airport is adjacent to the West Beach suburb and only 6km from the city centre. From the UK there are various one-stop flight options via the Far or Middle East. Returns from Heathrow or Manchester with Singapore Airlines (singaporeair.com) cost from £900; flight time from 24 hours.

Australian eVisitor visas are free for EU nationals; apply online (see overleaf). You will also have to fill out a customs declaration form and present this after collecting baggage. There is free WiFi as well as currency exchanges and ATMs on the ground floor of Arrivals.



Getting into town

Taxis are plentiful. A ride to the city centre takes only 15 minutes and costs about A\$25 (£12).

JetExpress buses run from the airport to central areas, JetBuses service other districts, including Glenelg. Single fares cost A\$4.90 (£2.30).



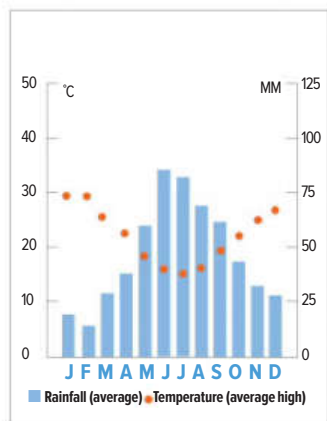
Other ways to arrive

The Indian Pacific railway connects Adelaide with Perth and Sydney; the historic *Ghan* train links it to Alice Springs and Darwin. Adelaide Railway Station is downtown on North Terrace, near many central hotels. There's a taxi rank outside. ►

HERE'S THE PLAN...

Essential Info

Population: 1.3 million
Languages: English
Time zone: GMT+9.5 (Oct-Apr GMT+10.5)
International dialling code: +61
Visas: Required by UK nationals. British citizens can apply for a free eVisitor visa at immi.gov.au.
Currency: Australian dollar (A\$), currently about A\$2.1 to the UK£.
Best viewpoint: There are sweeping views over Adelaide and the ocean from Windy



Point in the Adelaide Hills, 15 minutes' drive from the centre. Go for sunset, then watch the city lights start to twinkle.
Health issues: None in particular. Tap water is safe to drink and there are plenty of free drinking fountains around town. Stay well hydrated in summer when temperatures can top 40°C.
Recommended guidebook: *Central Australia* (Lonely Planet, 2013)
App: The What's On In Adelaide App is available to download free from iTunes.
Web resource: southaustralia.com
Climate: Similar to the eastern Med with hot summers (Dec-Feb), mild winters (Jun-Aug) when most rain falls, and mild springs and autumns.



BEST BARGAIN

A free hop on, hop off tram runs between the Adelaide Entertainment Centre, via central South Terrace, to Glenelg Beach. It runs every few minutes, every day.



Where to Stay

Top end: Majestic Roof Garden Hotel (55 Frome St; roofgardenhotel.com.au) is swish, modern and high-tech, with a relaxed, efficient style and an excellent central location. Doubles from A\$140 (£64). Sip a roof-top garden glass of chilled sémillon as the sun sets and you'll feel like a million dollars.
Mid-range: Adabco Boutique Hotel (223 Wakefield St; adabcohotel.com.au) dates from the end of the 19th century and is styled in a strange mixture of

Gothic and Venetian that reflects the cultural aspirations of Victorian Adelaide. Centrally located, it now has flat-screen, fast-WiFi airs. Doubles from A\$99 (£48).
Budget: Glenelg Beach Hostel (1-7 Moseley, St; glenelgbeachhostel.com.au) is the pick of the budget options in Adelaide's palindromic seaside suburb, housed in an old terraced house with a funky bar near the beach. Downtown is easily reached by (free) tram. Doubles from A\$70 (£33). Dorms also available.

First Day's Tour

Start the day at the indoor **Central Market**. This Victorian-era mega-mall features a lip-smacking array of bakers, fishmongers and emu-meat butchers.

For a grounding in local history, spare a couple of hours for the **South Australian Museum** (free; samuseum.sa.gov.au). The must-see section is the Australian Aboriginal Cultures Gallery where, among the extensive collection of indigenous artefacts, you can dream with the Kaurna people who revered red kangaroos.

Next, stroll along **North Terrace**, where South Australia's history unravels in memorials, statues and historic buildings such as Parliament House and the Governor's Residence. The boulevard's eastern end spills into the **Adelaide Botanic Gardens**, which houses the Bicentennial Conservatory and Santos Museum of Economic Botany, as well as the solace (and booze) found in the **National Wine Centre** (tastings not free; wineaustralia.com.au).

You don't need to be a sports fan to appreciate the **Adelaide Oval** (guided tour A\$22 (£10); adelaideoval.com).



com.au), perhaps the world's most spectacular test cricket ground. To some, the turf out-hallows even **St Peter's Cathedral** bang next door, its twin spires rising behind the scoreboard.

End the day with a glass of cold, local Coopers at one of the **numerous pubs**. Then choose from the vast array of restaurants from around the world: Greek, Italian, Lebanese, Kashmiri, Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese, you name it...



Stay or Go

It is certainly worth lingering for a day or two before discovering some of South Australia's further-flung marvels. Wander the colonial-era districts and stretch your legs in the airy green parks, gardens and squares. Savour the flavours of Adelaide's newcomers with dining experiences from around the world, either on-the-go or at seated leisure. Spend a day on the golden sands of beachy, surfy **Glenelg**, especially if it is summer. And head up into the cool of the Adelaide Hills overlooking the city.

Beyond Adelaide, make for 'Australia's Galápagos', aka **Kangaroo Island** (pictured above; see *Wanderlust* issue 158) for a world-class wildlife experience. If the life-affirming properties of fine wine are your thing, hire a car and drive out to the **Barossa Valley**: swirl, sniff, sip – and hell, gulp – at famous wineries such as Penfolds and Wolf Blass. Further afield is the **Flinders Ranges NP** where you can take to the mountains for some of the most spectacular outback hiking in Oz.



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The shrinking planet

In the High Arctic, dogs often provide humans with an early warning against approaching bears. But this canine, perched on a melting ice shelf on Ellesmere Island's coastline, appears to be growling a warning about a different danger approaching humanity.

Sitting up in Canada's Nunavut territory, visitors enjoy the rugged island's landscape of icy valleys, mountains and glaciers. At 'the top of the world' on the island's northern tip, Quttinirpaaq NP is home to the Arctic wolf, polar bear and caribou, but its residents are under a serious threat from global warming. In the past 100 years,

the island's 10,000 sq km ice shelves have retreated by a vast 90%, with one of the largest – the Ayles ice shelf – breaking off from the mainland in 2005.

This is just one of the haunting pictures in *Arctica: The Vanishing North*, Sebastian Copeland's collection of images exploring the melting ice caps in the North Pole. And for many, these could well be their only view



of a fast disappearing world.

Arctica: The Vanishing North by Sebastian Copeland is out now, (teNeues, £80); www.teneues.com



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